BROWN BODIES HAVE NO GLORY: AN EXPLORATION OF BLACK WOMEN'S PORNOGRAPHIC IMAGES FROM SARA BAARTMAN TO THE PRESENT

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines the pornographic images of black women from Sara Baartman, the "Venus Hottentot," to the Middle Passage, the Auction Block, Plantation Life, Harlem Renaissance, Blaxpornploitation movies, mainstream contemporary cinema, and pornography. It is based on the premise that throughout history black women's images have been pornographic.

The researcher found that the pornographic images present in today's visual media are outgrowths of the debilitating, racialized and sexualized images of black women historically.

The conclusion drawn from the findings suggests that black women's images in cinema continue to subjugate and objectify black women on and off screen.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

One must examine the evolution of black women's pornographic images in film through the lens of their enslavement in Europe and America. The rape, exploitation, and dehumanization of black women during enslavement planted the seed for their pornographic images today. Black women's objectification was created in the cradle of white male racism, sexism, and patriarchy. Unfortunately, that objectification still flourishes today, at the hands of both white and black men. Patricia Hill Collins, author of *Black Feminist Thought* contends that "the treatment of Black women's bodies in...Europe and the United States, may be the foundation upon which contemporary pornography as representations of women's objectification, domination, and control is based" (136). This study, then, examines the historical evolution of the use of black women's bodies as objectified pornographic images from slavery to the present.

The process of enslavement, beginning with African women's capture on the African continent, formed the nexus of the racialized and sexualized images that exist of black women today. The split images consist of the perceived morally virtuous asexual black woman on the one hand and the highly sexualized black woman on the other. Instead of black women's bodies being viewed as temples, their bodies were used as

receptacles for white male lust. This degradation of the human body was a reality unknown to African women in their original homeland. Sexuality in Africa was not governed by constructs of sin and shame; rather, it was celebrated as part of life's self-expression. In *African Religions and Philosophy*, John S. Mbiti writes that, for African people, sex was attached not simply to the biological, but was indeed an act which celebrated one's entire being. He affirms that Africans saw "the sacredness of sex, in the sight of God, the spirits, the living, the dead and the human community" (125).

In pre-modern Europe and the Americas, however, sex was often seen as debased and unholy. Lucienne Frappier-Mazur supports this idea in *The Invention of Pornography* when he writes that, among ancient Europeans "the body is scorned and rejected as something inferior, and at the same time desired as something forbidden, objectified, and alienated" (213). However, notions of sin could be ignored and forgiven when black women became the objects of sexual conquest. To be sure, white male conscience's were easily ignored since "non human" Africans were the object of their debased activity.

In the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, black women were stripped of their humanity, shackled, chained, poked, prodded, raped, and exploited before they reached the shores of Europe and America. In other words, one can assume that the black woman's context of sex and sexuality, as well as her inherent freedom and self-affirming body image, were dismantled long before reaching foreign lands. Indeed, black women's oppressive and dehumanizing treatment from slave ships to the auction blocks to the plantation provide a context from which to understand their sexualized images in pornography today. During enslavement, black women were considered less than human; therefore,

sexual liberties were taken with their bodies which now another owned. Mainstream cinema and pornography, past and present, depict black women in similar fashion—black women on the periphery of film. Further, "Black women in their historic servitude and physical appearance assume a certain uncomfortable present absense within white visual culture" (Smith-Shomade 33).

This 'present absence' was a cruel reality. For example, the enslaved woman's body belonged to her enslavers, the captain, and crew. George Francis Dow supports the notion in *Slave Ships and Slaving* that black women's bodies served to satisfy the lustful nature of white men. Such excessive public access undoubtedly laid the groundwork for present day dehumanization and exploitation of black women at the hands of white men. "On board some slave ships the common sailors are allowed to have intercourse with such of the Black women. . .The officers are permitted to indulge their passion among them at pleasure and sometimes guilty of excess as to disgrace human nature" (Dow 145).

Black women were herded in shackles from slave ships to the auction block for inspection. Every inch of their being was invaded and dissected so that whites could bid on their bodies. Black women's bodies provided pleasure and profit for white men. Their breasts were lifted, their teeth checked, their buttocks parted. The physical and psychical abuses they suffered and endured on the slave ship were felt for the rest of their lives.

Typically, when the enslaved woman arrived at the plantation, her enslaver dictated what happened to her body, especially with whom she would mate. Consequently, black women had minimal control over their bodies, and, if they voiced their objections, they were often silenced with brute force and/or the dismantling of their

families. White men could have sex with them at will. He owned her, controlled her, used her, abused her, exploited her, and profited from her body. Ironically, he was like a sculptor who purchased a mound of black clay. He molded and shaped her image so thoroughly that she would never own it again. Jean Baker Miller, in her essay "Domination and Subordination," writes about the power of one group over another and its ramifications:

> A dominant group, inevitably has the greatest influence in determining a culture's overall outlook-its philosophy, morality, social theory, and even its science. The dominant group, thus, legitimizes the unequal relationship and incorporates it into society's guiding concepts (89).

Put simply, black women were dominated and controlled in their relationships with white men. This inequality, formed during enslavement, can now be seen in mainstream cinema and pornography.

White women, however, encountered a different set of rules regarding sex. White culture believed them to be chaste, pure, and untouchable. What was unimaginable to act out sexually with white women, white men acted out on black women. As Paula Giddings observes in *When and Where I Enter*, "The white wife was hoisted on a pedestal so high that she was beyond the sensual reach of her own husband" (43). Therefore, black women's bodies became the sexual outlet for white men.

Paradoxically, white women's sexuality was ascribed a certain power with the emergence of pornography in Europe during the eighteenth century. Their sexuality was used to set a political tone. For example, writers of the period would use the prostitute's "voice" to indict the aristocracy. Author Lynn Hunt writes:

> By using pornography as a vehicle to attack everything from the humanist educational program to clerical piety to the vicissitudes of court life, Aretino [Pietro, father of pornography] exposed the vices of the upper

> classes. . .He further offended the upper-class sense of propriety by putting his pronouncements in the mouth of a whore (101).

When white women were put on display, they were deemed by society as deformed or freakish in appearance, yet even these women were able to reap miniscule benefits from the exploitation of their bodies. Oftentimes, white women in freak shows were independent of handlers. They were able to keep their profits in a way that South Africa's Ms. Sara Baartman was not. Yet, black women were bought and sold with impunity, and did not profit from the use of their bodies. In order to justify the objectification of black women, white men created images of black women that posited them as lewd, lusty, sexual savages. Unfortunately, these images, over time, morphed into such mythological proportions that black culture began often to embrace them as truth. Author Jacqueline Rose introduces the theory of the mirror image created by Jacques Lacan: "The mirror image represents the moment when the subject is located in an order outside itself to which it will hence forth refer" (qtd. in Rose 1986, 53).

Indeed, pornography in a socio-historical American context begins with the sexual objectification of black women upon capture and arrival in America and Europe. Ergo, as pornography became mainstream and hardcore, the dehumanization of black women became a cultural mainstay.

The objectification of black women during their enslavement is continued in contemporary film and pornography. Concomitantly, the same racialized and sexualized images of black women established on the plantation, endure as the basis of the current black woman's public image. Said differently, black female film stars are relegated to the position of sexual "other" while white women are given options regarding their images in both genres. Black women are rarely central to the movie plot. They are

usually cast as the loud mouth whore, buppie bitch, or "hoochie." Rarely is the black woman a love interest. However, white women's roles range from scientist to seductress, and in the end, she almost always wins the heart of the male star in the movie. Thus, the history of black women's sexual exploitation can be traced from Sara Baartman to the present.

Significance of Study

Black women's images in the context of pornographic films have yet to be examined. It is important to look at the ways black women's images are constructed and posited as "other" in film. This study then is significant because it offers scholars a vital road map to travel as one attempts to free black women from the bondage of negative imagery and sanctioned public abuse. It insists that silences be lifted around the issue of black women's objectification and that serious attention be given to the ways American culture continues to dehumanize and, indeed, destroy black women.

Research questions which govern this study: (1) How does the historical exploitation of black women connect to their modern day cinematic images in mainstream cinema and pornography? (2) Are mainstream black female stars portrayed differently than white female stars in mainstream cinema? (3) Do the pornographic images of black women in mainstream cinema and pornography further serve to support racist and sexist notions of black womanhood?

Black women's images in mainstream cinema and pornography reinforce sexualized stereotypes, which are promoted and endorsed by white America. Patricia Hill Collins asserts that images such as the jezebel, whore, or "hoochie" support racist

ideologies and the continued marginalization of black women by white men and women. The dehumanizing images reflected in these genres further support the exploitation and oppression of black women in their interactions with white men, black men, white women, and each other.

Limitations of Study

This study has several limitations regarding black women's pornographic images in cinema. One such limitation is the current definition of pornography as it relates to black women, as well as, the lack of new terms with which to discuss this burgeoning research topic. For example, the word "blackpornploitation" takes the place of the common word "pornography." The term blackpornploitation makes an important distinction because the combination of black women and pornography then becomes culturally specific and unique to the racialization and sexualization of black women.

Thorough investigation into the life and historical implications of Sara Baartman are so scant as to make it practically impossible to discern exactly how she lived and later suffered under the hands of her captors. Barbara Chase-Riboud's *Hottentot Venus* stands as the only full length examination of Ms. Baartman to date. This fact renders my study critical although simultaneously difficult.

Organization of Thesis

Chapter One introduces the readers to the themes in *Brown Bodies Have No Glory*. Chapter two is the Review of Literature. It provides an analysis of scholars who have written about the subject matter. Chapter three devotes itself to the life and times of

Sara Baartman. Chapter four focuses on the Middle Passage, plantation life, and the Harlem Renaissance. Chapter five covers blaxploitation cinema and suggests the period was "blackpornploitation" as coined by the author. Chapter six details the racist and sexist images in pornographic movies. Chapter seven concludes the ideas set forth throughout *Brown Bodies Have No Glory*.

Definition of Terms

African Aesthetic: A medium of artistic expression of a people, their past, which celebrates their future by enclosing their cultural truths in all forms of artistic expression.

African Feminism: Combines racial, sexual, class, and cultural dimensions of oppression to produce a more inclusive brand of feminism through which women are viewed as human, rather than sexual, beings.

Blackpornploitation: the study of black women's sexual objectification and exploitation from a socio-historical, economic, and political point of view.

Blaxploitation: refers to a film genre developed in the United States in the early 1970s. The films in this genre tended to feature broad stereotypes of African-American culture.

Close-up: A framing in which the scale of the object shown is relatively large; most commonly a person's head seen from the neck up, or an object of a comparable size that fills most of the screen.

Editing: In filmmaking, the task of selecting and joining takes.

Extreme close-up: A framing in which the scale of the object shown is very large; most commonly, a small object or a part of the body.

Feminist Film Theory: Beginning in the 1960's, feminist film theory focused on the spectator, feminity as subject positions, textual analysis, cinematic (or televisual) institutions as context, and sexual difference constructed though look and spectacle.

Framing: The use of edges of the film frame to select and to compose what will be visible on screen.

Medium close-up: A framing in which the scale of the object shown is fairly large; a human figure seen from the chest up would fill most of the screen.

Mise-en-scene: All of the elements placed in front of the camera to be photographed, the settings and props, lighting, costumes and make-up, and figure of behavior.

Money Shot: Hard-core pornographic shot, which shows male ejaculation

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Review of Literature

The phrase "history repeats itself" takes on new meaning when examining black women's pornographic images. Scholarly texts such as Donald Bogle's *Brown Sugar* have often compartmentalized the evolution of black women's images studying only select years or periods. However, none has seemingly synthesized these studies of the pornographic images of black women throughout history. Other such scholars, such as Patricia Hill Collins have established that black women have been posited as sexually deviant beginning with the nineteenth century, but a thorough examination of how and why that image has flourished into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries appears nonexistent (Hines and Humez 1995; Willis and Williams 2002, 3).

In *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins examines, though scantily, black women's images from Ms. Sara Baartman (Venus Hottentot), to the auction block, to their place in contemporary pornography. She concludes her text by reminding the reader that empowerment for black women is best served by collective action. Unfortunately, Collins omits the racialized and sexualized images of black women during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and the 1960s blaxploitation era.

However, author Elizabeth Hadley Freydberg's essay "Sapphires, Spitfires,

Sluts, and Superbitches" fills this void by examining the exploitative images of black women in blaxploitation movies. Freydberg exposes blaxploitation movies for what they really were—sexual outlets for men both white and black (Freydberg 1995, 232).

Blaxploitation movies had a vast social and historical context, yet Freydberg misses a valuable opportunity to make the connection between black women's exploited images in blaxploitation movies and their racialized and sexualized images throughout history.

Zola Maseko's documentary, *The Life and Times of Sara Baartman*: *Venus Hottentot,* begins to correct this historic omission by providing a detailed account of the life of Ms. Baartman. The documentary offers illustrations and advertisements, which depict Ms. Baartman in sexually explicit positions. For example, one advertisement portrays Ms. Baartman standing on an auction block, garishly dressed, while European spectators poke, prod, and peer at her body. Unlike Collins, Maseko does not link the exploitation of Ms. Baartman in Europe to her African sisters in the United States. In essence, the documentary provides an historical account of Ms. Baartman's journey from South Africa to Europe, but does not analyze the exploitation of Ms. Baartman in Europe and the subsequent impact on the lives of black women in America.

Noted scholar Sander L. Gilman's essay "Black Bodies, White Bodies" examines European fascination with Ms. Baartman from a scientific perspective. Scientific reports and medical opinions concerning the primitive nature of Ms. Baartman, her steatopygia, and her genitalia posited Ms. Baartman as a highly-sexed deviant female. The medical reports of the day posited Ms. Baartman's genitalia and buttocks as deformed and unusual, suggesting her near relationship to the animal kingdom, and, therefore,

justifying their conclusion that African women were sexually deviant and bestial (Brantlinger 197, 1985). Interestingly enough, Gilman notes that the European public and scientists failed to critique their obsession with the black female body. He acknowledges that Ms. Baartman's images laid the groundwork for the images of black women that exist today.

Interestingly enough, Beverly Guy-Sheftall's "The Body Politic: Black Female Sexuality and the Nineteenth-Century Euro American Imagination" examines the "cultural construction of black women's sexuality" and provides an analysis of black women's images during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Dr. Sheftall explores the relationship between Ms. Sara Baartman—"Venus Hottentot"—in relation to the scientist George Cuvier who denigrated and dissected Ms. Baartman's body in life and in death. Cuvier's study promoted the idea of the apelike and animal-like nature of black women and it is tantamount to Cuvier's justification of the exploitation of Ms. Baartman, leaving Dr. Sheftall to conclude that, among whites of the time, "there is nothing sacred about Black women's bodies. . ." (Guy-Sheftall 2002, 14).

Author Karen Ross in *Black and White Media: Black Images in Popular Film and Television* investigates black identity in mainstream cinema. Ross suggests that the new visual medium (film) allowed Hollywood to further exploit the images of African Americans. According to Ross, "the exciting visual style of film enabled a much fuller exploitation and exaggeration of these types to be demonstrated" (Ross 1996, 10). Ross analyzes mainstream and independent movies produced and directed by African American filmmakers such as Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* and John Singleton's *Boyz N the Hood*. Ross argues that many mainstream movies by blacks, especially men,

depict ". . .women [who] are routinely abused, both physically and verbally and rarely emerge as credible or creditable characters. Women are constantly described as whores and bitches. . ." (Ross 1996, 74).

Alternately, in discussing independent movies such as *Daughters of the Dust*, Ross observes the challenges inherent in producing independent movies of substance, Hollywood's conservatism, and its insistence on supporting "formulaic projects which guarantee success" (Ross 1996, 74), but almost certainly promote stereotypical images of black women and men.

Further examination of black women's images is found in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* by bell hooks. Hook's explores the meaning of the spectator's gaze and its relationship to black women. Without making specific reference to Ms. Sara Baartman, bell hooks analyzes the meaning of buttocks in relation to pornography, which is a direct manifestation of the objectification of Ms. Baartman. Hooks contends that, "In the sexual iconography of the traditional pornographic imagination, the protruding butt is seen as a indication of heightened sexuality" (Hooks 1992, 63).

Ultimately, black women's sexuality can be deconstructed through the prism of the white male gaze. Mainstream cinema and pornography are cinematic tools which breathe life into patriarchal, racist, and sexist notions of black womanhood, and therefore allows the spectator to posit black women as objectified other (Thornham 1999, 217). Bell Hooks supports this point when she writes, "These looking relations were reinforced as whites cultivated the practice of denying subjectivity of blacks (the better to dehumanize and oppress), of relegating them to the realm of the invisible" (Hooks 1992, 168).

Clearly, scholars have established overwhelming evidence which proves that, historically, black women were oppressed and objectified. However, this seeks to shift the scholarship by positing black women's images as the beginning of pornography.

Conceptual Framework

The womanist perspective is the point of view guiding this research. In *In Search of Our Mothers Garden: Womanist Prose*, Alice Walker defines womanism as:

> From *womanish* (opp. Of 'girlish' i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From black folk expression of mothers to female children, 'you acting womanish' i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered 'good' for me, interested in doing grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. In charge. Serious. . .Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female (Walker XI, 1983).

In addition to Walker's definition of womanism, the researcher suggests that womanism is also "truth-telling." Womanism implies having integrity and standing for what is right even when the world chooses not to. The womanist perspective means critically analyzing history and black women's place in history in order to challenge the status quo, which relegates black women to the bottom rung of society. Put simply, it is important to write from a womanist perspective when examining the exploitation of black women in pornography, for this positioning opens the door to a critique of the social and historical ramifications of black women as "objectified other."

Cinematic apparatuses such as camera angles, framing, editing, the zoom lens, and the "money shot" are important tools when addressing the issues of black women in blaxpornploitation. The use of these apparatuses has special significance as it pertains to black women for, unlike with white women, they function to objectify and dehumanize

black women's bodies in peculiar ways. *Camera angles*, for example, are used to exploit black women in contemporary pornography by looking at their anatomy from low, high, and straight on angles. *Framing* selects her body parts, which will be visible on the screen. *Editing* is used to cut and splice her image from the viewpoint of the spectator. The *zoom lens* magnifies the vagina, mouth, and buttocks of the women. The "*money shot*" captures the male climaxing on the black woman or women. Linda Williams in *HardCore, Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible*" writes, "The obsessively repeated meat shot [money shot). . . oscillates restlessly between genital show and genital event, sometimes signifying climax, culmination [and] possession. . ." (Williams 83, 1989).

By analyzing cinematic tools, womanists engaging in film theory can examine black femininity as objectified otherness. This approach allows for a textual analysis of black women in mainstream cinema and pornography, compared to white women in mainstream cinema and pornographic films. Louise Baudry asserts this notion in her essay, "The Apparatus":

> Cinema facilitates a temporary regression on the part of the viewing subject to a psychically earlier...mode of merger in which the separation between body and world is not well defined and in which 'representations'-whether of the unconscious or of the film-'are taken as perception' (Baudry 2004, 314).

The womanist perspective permits the researcher to explore all aspects of black womanhood and black women's relationship to the community and to society at-large. The study of black women in pornography, when performed in a womanist context, allows the researcher to analyze the exploitation of black women and its effects on the black community, since the dehumanization of black women does not only affect women.

Indeed, the debilitating images of black women serve to destroy the stability of the black family and to reinforce to society that black women's cultural deterioration is their own undoing.

Further, the womanist perspective is a tool which can challenge the exploitation of black women. It calls for the entire African-American community to have a stake in the construction and deconstruction of black women's images. The inclusive nature of womanism insists that black women and men from all socio-economic classes contribute to the reconstruction of black women's images. It means that images which dehumanize and stereotype black women will no longer be found acceptable, even to patriarchal black men who, personally, do not find such images troublesome. Womanist scholar Beretta Smith-Shomade maintains that, "Womanist theory does not suggest nor advocate that televised or real-life Black women forgo their tendencies to provide comfort and support. It does, however, call for opportunity, recognition, and subjecthood. . ." (Smith-Shomade 68, 2002).

Methodology

An examination of the historical progression of black women's pornographic images, throughout the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, requires the use of historical comparative analysis.

This method examines social issues within their own historical context, by analyzing, both literally and figuratively, primary and secondary source material. Historical analysis incorporates data such as oral testimonies (slave accounts), slave ship diaries, autobiographies, books, films, and periodicals, allowing the researcher to utilize

these tools and draw conclusions which lend insight into contemporary scholarship. Toward this end, this thesis examines the pornographic images of black women, from Sara Baartman to the present.

However, one cannot rely on these sources alone. Babbie contends that ". . .you cannot trust the accuracy of records, official or unofficial, primary or secondary. Your protection lies in replication: In the case of historical research it lies in *corroboration*" (Babbie 1989, 321).

Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to corroborate with leading scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins and Sander L. Gilman to show that, from black women's arrival in America and Europe, their images have been racialized and sexualized at the expense of their own personal worth. Black women's emergence in the world of pornography reflects the historically stereotypical images of black women, and these same images are embedded in soft and hard-core pornography as well as mainstream American cinema.

CHAPTER 3

MS. SARA BAARTMAN

In order to critique the dehumanizing, exploitative, pathological, and pornographic images of black women in pornography, one must deconstruct the societal forces from which these images arise. Sander L. Gilman, author of "Black Bodies, White Bodies," writes that, in the nineteenth century, "Sarah Baartman's sexual parts, her genitalia and buttocks, serve as the central image for the black female throughout the nineteenth century" (Gilman 1980, 233). The sexual exploitation of black women in a public space, the demonization of black women, and the creation of social constructs that present them as deviant and inferior are ingredients of a pornographic image. The image of South Africa's Ms. Sara Baartman, commonly referred to as the "Hottentot Venus" or "Venus Hottentot," is the birth of the public sexual exploitation of black women.

Ms. Baartman's journey begins in South Africa where she lived as a member of the Khoikhoi nation (Davie 2002, 1). In 1652, the Dutch invaded the region and introduced foreign elements of female objectification previously unknown to the Khoikhoi. More specifically, they made a fetish of the women's protruding buttocks—an aesthetic characteristic embraced among the native people as beautiful and sensual. However, so amazed were the Dutchmen at these African women's exteriors that the white men began to think of ways to exploit and parade them among European nations.

Essentially, these intruders deteriorated a beautiful African trait into an abnormality about which the world would soon mock and jeer (Gilman 1980, 233).

Sara Baartman was one such unfortunate Khoikhoi whose life and buttocks fell into the hands of Dutch slavers. The Dutch farmer, Peter Cezar, became her owner and she served him as either a slave or an indentured servant. Scholars have yet to determine her precise role under Cezar's ownership.

Yet, according to Dutch records, Ms. Baartman was owned by Peter Cezar until 1810. In 1810, his brother, Hendric Cezar and his partner/surgeon Alexander Dunlop bought Ms. Baartman from Peter. Historian Carmel Schrire suggests that Ms. Baartman's enslavement to Hendric Cezar and her subsequent journey to London was a far better life than she would have lived in South Africa (Schrire 1996, 349); however, her enslavement on either continent pales in comparison to what was once her liberty and freedom. In "Native Views of Western Eyes," Carmel Schrire writes:

> Where Saartje was concerned it is likely that the pleasure of life in London far outstripped the alternative, cooking and cleaning in the master's house at the Cape, washing madam's feet, squatting on the stone floor next to the smoking hearth. For all their legendary beauty, she surely saw more diverting sights than the Cape mountains and seas as she travelled from England to France, there to pose in Paris for science, as well as, for the general public(Schrire 1996, 349).

On March 8, 1810, Ms. Baartman left for England with Cezar and Dunlop on a three-month voyage that would prove to be a profitable venture for Cezar and Dunlop. She arrived in London and "starred" center stage in London's famous Picadilly Square, where naked buttocks became the biggest attraction of the period. Picadilly Square was infamous for its "freak shows" held at center square (Strother 2001, 27).

By this time, Hendric Cezar had full ownership of Ms. Baartman, Dunlop

having severed his ties to this enterprise. This proved to be a bounty for Cezar. He charged audiences two shillings per head from one to five o'clock to "view" Ms. Baartman. Maseko's documentary, *The Life and Times of Sara Baartman: Venus Hottentot*, indicates that Baartman's "freak show was a smashing success."

As aforestated, Baartman's steatopygia—the medical term for an enlargment of the buttocks was not unusual among KhoiKhoi women, but her physiology, plus the unbridled lust of her captors, proved to be her demise. Europeans had long written of African women's 'unusual' genitalia (fig. 1, p. 21). "Travellers such as LeValliant in the eighteenth century, had painted images of women flashing long pendulous labia. Captain Cook had written that the "Hottentot" women had labia that "resembled the teats of a cow. . ." (Smith 1996, 255).

Thus, European audiences eagerly awaited the opportunity to prod and poke Baartman's body in order to confirm what they had always assumed—the bestial nature of African women. "One spectator pinched her, another walked around her; one gentleman poked her with his cane; and one lady employed her parasol to ascertain that all was, as she called it, 'natural'" (Strother 1999, 27). This despicable treatment of Baartman was understood as criminal because African people were not deemed human and thus worth respect. In European eyes, she and Africans in general were without feelings and had no civil or human rights.

European scientists and social theorists of the nineteenth century had already "established" the deviant nature of the African mind and body, but truly to believe the scientists, the public had to determine for themselves Baartman's "freakish" nature. And, to be sure, they were only too ready to do so since the racial dichotomy reinforced their

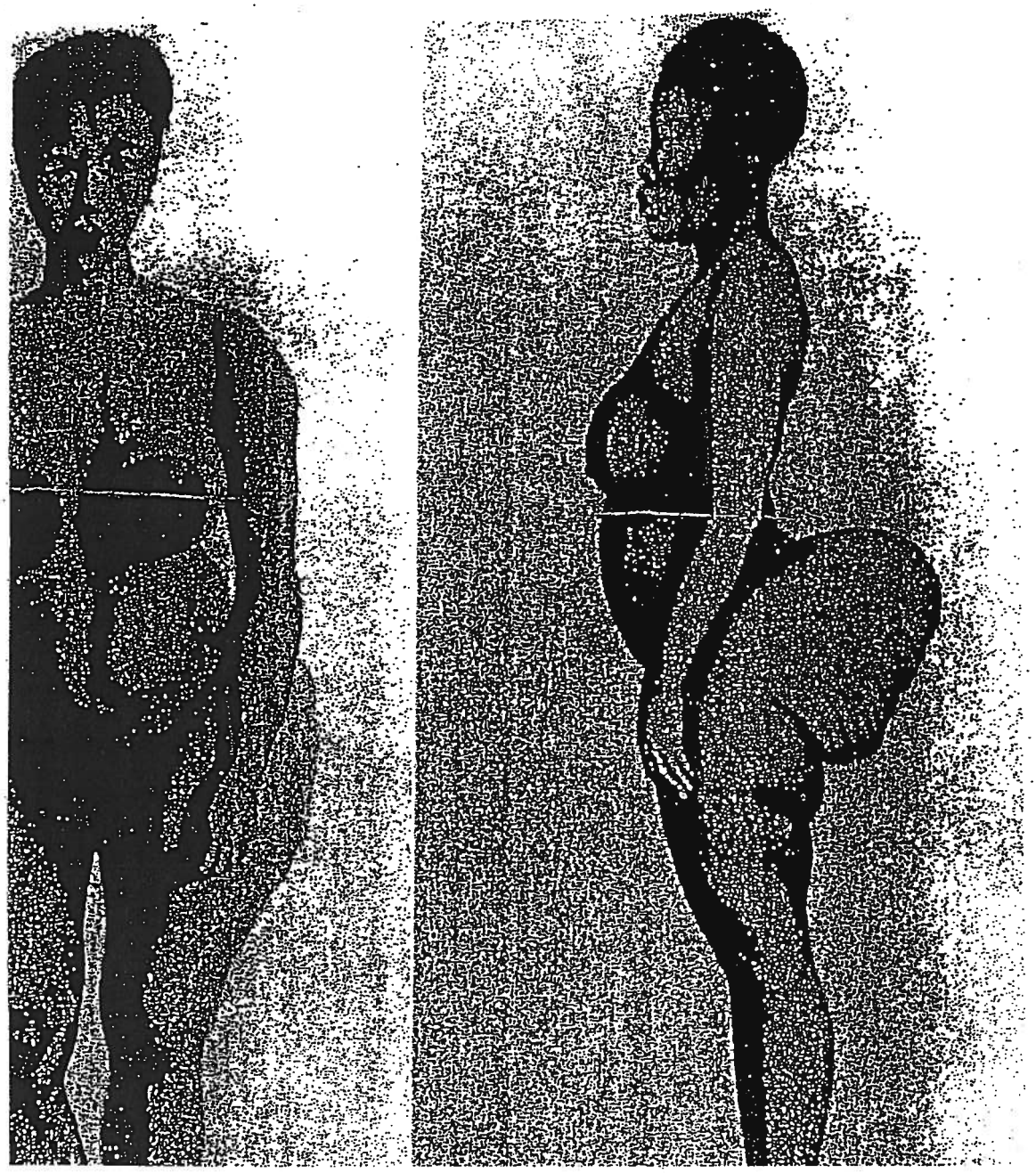

Fig. 1. Photo of Ms. Baartman, Miscast, 1996.

own superiority. According to Z.S. Strothers:

> The freak, it must be emphasized, is a freak of culture. His or her anomalous status is articulated articulated by the process of the spectacle as it distances the viewer and thereby it 'normalizes' the viewer as much as it marks the freak as an observation (Strothers 1999, 24).

By making Baartman the freak, these Londoners could go home assured of their own normalcy and racial divinity (fig. 2 p. 23). They now could hide their own lust and sadomasochistic behavior behind the mask of "scientific curiosity."

Logically, if the black female body were "freakish" in design, then, by extension, African people and African culture were also abnormal. A century later, scholars see how this seemingly logical conclusion paved the way for the blooming of pornographic images of black women in mainstream cinema and pornography. The victimization of Ms. Baartman laid the groundwork for the victimization and exploitation of black women in America as sexual objects, freaks, playthings, and possessors of unusual body organs.

Consequently, racist theories of evolution supported the notion of a deviant sexuality in black women. For example, out of the idea of a "Dark Continent" arose the concept of a beastly people whose liberation from their savage ways rested in the cradle of European civilization. "The theory that man evolved through distinct social stages—from savagery to barbarism to civilization—led to a self—congratulatory anthropology that actively promoted belief in the inferiority—indeed the bestiality of the African" (Brantlinger 1985, 203).

The problem, of course, is that Europeans did not liberate Ms. Baartman or the Khoikhoi women who came after her. In fact, the public exploitation of black women became commonplace after Ms. Baartman's death. In 1829, for instance, a nude Hottentot woman, also called "the Hottentot Venus," was the prize attraction at a ball

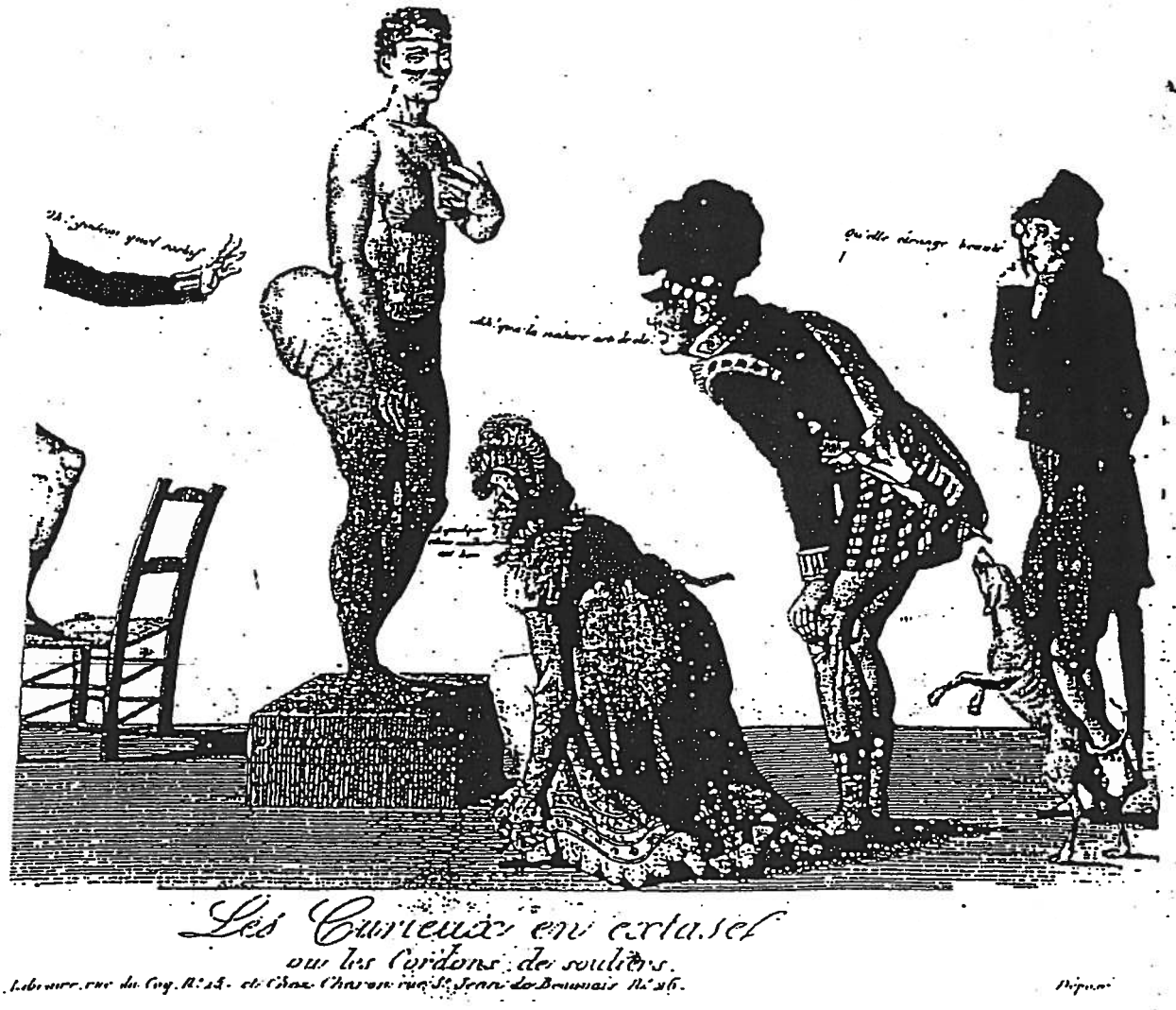

Fig. 2. Cartoon of Ms. Baartman, Miscast, 1996.

given by the Duchess of DuBarry in Paris" (Gilman 1980, 232). Without reservation, racist and sexist images of black women as noble savages and sexual deviants justified the continued objectification of black women in Europe and America centuries after Ms. Baartman's demise. "A Bushwoman named Afandi had allowed herself to be exhibited in Central Europe, and when she died [Hubert von] Luschker [1820-1875] made a careful autopsy and anatomical report on her, with illustrations" (www.carlagirl.net).

Historically, researchers' scientific notions of black female physiology and physiognomy supported racist and sexist theories, Hendric Cezar seized upon scientific theories of racial inferiority in his quest to manipulate and exploit Ms. Baartman. Other European slavers would do likewise for the next century or more. In 1819, in the *Dictionary of Medical Science*, Dr. Julien-Joseph Virey offered a "scientific" explanation regarding the physiognomy of blacks:

> Among us [whites] the forehead is pushed forward, the mouth is pulled back as if we were destined to think rather than eat; the Negro has a shortened forehead and a mouth that is pushed forward as if he were made to eat instead of think (www.geocities.com).

In 1814, Cezar took twenty-four year old Ms. Baartman to France. After being greeted with minor protests upon arrival in Paris—some Parisians felt the treatment of Ms. Baartman was inhumane—Cezar sold her to an animal trainer named Riou. The latter obviously ignored public protestation and exhibited Ms. Baartman on stage in Paris from eleven to nine o'clock, charging a fee of three francs. Clearly some Parisians enjoyed the display. In fact, once exhibited in France, European obsession with Ms. Baartman's genitalia and buttocks eclipsed that in England. Cezar and Dunlop created advertisements and cartoons that displayed Ms. Baartman's physiology, much to the

delight of French audiences. The advertisements enticed audiences to view Ms. Baartman without the façade of sexual guilt hanging over their heads. One such advertisement read:

> A most correct and perfect specimen of that race of people. From this extraordinary phenomena of nature, the public will have an opportunity of judging how far she exceeds any description given by historians of that tribe of human species. She is habited in the dress of her country, with all the rude ornaments usually worn by those people (Strother 1999, 25).

Further, before her death, Ms. Baartman became a scientific specimen for French scientist Georges Cuvier. She was forced to pose nude for Cuvier and other scientists. The scientists were particularly interested in the width and length of her labia minora. However, despite her limited authority, Ms. Baartman attempted to maintain a modicum of control over her body, much to the consternation of Cuvier:

> She managed to hide the hypertrophy of the labia minora: but at this first inspection one observed nothing of the most remarkable detail of her organization; she held her apron carefully hidden either between her thighs or more deeply, and it was only after her death that one ascertained that she possessed it. . .In Baartman's gesture of scorn, she refuses to enact fully the body Hottentot, the bearer of ultimate difference as Cuvier was to represent it (Stother 1999, 35).

Clearly, Ms. Baartman recognized that her body was "important" to Cuvier. She decided within the confines of her environment and her limited power to protect what Cuvier and others seemed desirous of—her labia minora—and in this way she maintained a degree of control over her body.

Eventually, Parisians became enamoured with other "freak" shows. As result, Riou dismissed Ms. Baartman. "Once the Parisians got tired of the Baartman show, she was forced to turn to prostitution" (Davie 2002, 2). Perhaps Ms. Baartman turned to prostitution because she believed that her body was her only viable source of income.

Clearly, she had observed the financial rewards her white owners had profited from her body. It is possible, Ms. Baartman might have surmised that prostitution could elevate her life circumstances, thereby allowing her, instead of others, to benefit from her body.

As with so many women, the "body politic" is the entity that both sustains and claims one's life. The "body politic" is the entity that one sometimes has to rely on within a social context, yet the price for accepting the handouts of the "body politic" affords the "powers that be," specifically white men, the ability to shape and dictate the individual's life.

Unfortunately, Ms. Baartman could not articulate her suffering and declare her pain. For years, Ms. Baartman was publicly paraded throughout Europe, fulfilling the fantasies of the European public, and when they became bored with her "freak show," she was discarded and left penniless. However, their sexual curiosity and white supremacy were confirmed. Europeans assured themselves that Ms. Baartman was indeed a beast from an alien culture. Lucille Davie writes that some historians believe that Ms. Baartman turned to alcohol to drown her demons. "She died in 1815 at the age of twenty-five. The cause of death was given as 'inflammatory and eruptive sickness.' Possibly syphilis" (www.safrica.info).

In the end, what Ms. Baartman tried to protect in life Cuvier discovered and displayed after her death at the Musee de l'Homme in Paris. She was dissected and exhibited for public consumption, reassuring both male and female Europeans that the African body and Africans in general were antithetical to them.

The question here, however, is what did the dominant culture, specifically white men, gain from objectifying the black female? Certainly, the financial rewards were an

incentive, witnessed by the financial success of Hendric Cezar as he hustled Ms. Baartman from London to Paris. Yet, a more insidious gain seeps into the picture—the desire to control Ms. Baartman's body and thereby to release repressed sexual desires. European and American men of the nineteenth century were caught in a cultural bifurcation of their own making regarding black women's bodies. Put simply, they viewed black women with a mixture of both scorn and lust. On the one hand, they likened her lips and eyes to apes and deemed her genitalia and buttocks abnormal. Yet, on the other hand, they acted out their sexual fantasies with black women. "The black woman occupied, like a prop or piece of drapery through her real status as servant/slave/colonized subject, the lowest rung in a socio-economic hierarchy, serving the ends of private pleasure or economic/imperial domination" (www.carlagirl.net).

Paradoxically, white women, in order to attract white men, thought to replicate the black female form. They bound their waists with bustles, which gave the illusion of protruding buttocks. John R. Baker writes that Darwin, father of evolution, was fascinated with black women's posteriors, while white women in England wore bustles to change their shape to attract white men. He writes:

> Darwin implied in the case of Hottentot women in whom "the posterior part of the body projects in a wonderful manner". . .he wrote his work on sexual selection at the time when bustles were in fashion in England, and he must have realized that the women who wore them were under the impression that this change in their appearance increased their charm for members of the opposite sex (Baker 2003, 5).

Thus the public display of Baartman's buttocks serve as the birth of black women's racialization and sexualization in Europe and America.

The Middle Passage

Everything about Ms. Baartman's life and public humiliation can never be known. Yet what scholars do know is that her African sisters and brothers were exploited during the Middle Passage and enslavement equally after Baartman's death. The public exploitation and consumption of black women throughout the Middle Passage created a system whereby white men could express the deviant nature of their sexuality. Often, on these sea voyages, whereby enslaved Africans were dispersed throughout the world African women and children were kept aboard deck. "The women were allowed to move around the upper decks, by day. . .on many vessels, so that white men from the captain to the cook's helper could unleash their lust against them" (Harding 1981, 12). However, at night, the women were packed in the bowels of the ship, only to be roused, then raped by the crew.

Moreover, researchers refer to slave logs, which suggest that African women were scantily clad. Their breasts went uncovered and a piece of cloth covered their vaginas, thereby, again, providing white captors easy access to her body. "The females part with reluctance the only trifling rag that covers their Black modesty. As they are kept in total nudity the whole voyage. . ." (Conneau 1976, 82).

Generally speaking, black women were the objects of white male sexual desire on board slave ships, and the former, unfortunately had no recourse against constant abuse. There was simply no way to escape the brutality forced upon them. African men were unable to help them as throughout the voyage white seamen raped African women repeatedly:

> On board some slave ships the common sailors are allowed to have intercourse with such of the Black women. . .The officers are permitted to

> indulge their passions among them at pleasure and sometimes are guilty of such brutal excess as to disgrace human nature (Conneau 1976, 145).

Many African women were undoubtedly coerced into providing sexual favors for their white captors; for the enslaved woman, this act was surely a means of survival. Of course, there were African women who refused the advances of the white slavers, but they too paid a price. Nonetheless, scholar Clarence Munford argues that some black women on slave ships were, in actuality, prostitutes. He suggests that many traded their bodies for more favorable treatment from the captain and crew. Of course "favorable" is relative here, for these women were still enslaved and had no real control over the exploitation of their bodies. As Munford indicates:

> Conditions aboard ship were designed to debauch female captives. The less resolute were enticed and depraved by favors and alleviations in order to elicit a specious sensuality. A kind of prostitution developed in which some women were treated less viciously than other captives as a reward for sexual complaisance toward the crew (Munford 1997, 307).

Auction Block

The exploitation of black women did not end with the Middle Passage. Once slaves arrived at their destination in the southern states of America, the auction block placed the black female body center stage once again. White men were able to examine, discuss, and purchase an enslaved woman for various "duties." According to William Brennan:

> This is a very choice specimen. . .Here one [of] the gentlemen in a distant part of the room cried out, 'send her this way'. . . The "gentleman" then turned her around, told her to 'grin,' to show her teeth, and pushed lips aside with his fingers, he examined her person, from head to foot (Brennan 1995, 2).

The auction block experiences of black women in America are eerily similar to Ms. Baartman's experiences in Europe. Black women in Europe and America were paraded, poked, and prodded, similar to cattle at an auction. Black women on the auction block were staged and arranged to bring about the greatest financial and personal rewards for white men. In *In the Hands of Strangers: Reading on Foreign and Domestic Slave Trading and the Crisis of the Union*, author Robert Edgar Conrad includes eighty-five year old former slave Minte Maria Miller's account of being sold on the auction block:

> I don' know how much dey sold me for. I know dat de man dat bought me open my mouth while he look at my teeth. Dey did all de slaves dat way. Sold dem jus' like you sell a horse (Conrad 2001, 270).

Consequently, black women on the auction block were posited both as sources of labor and sources of pleasure for white men. Typically, enslaved women and men were bought and sold with impunity. The auction block sought to shatter the hope that black women could maintain a sense of family and personal self-esteem. To whites, they were merely soulless bodies; yet they had immense value to slavers, especially if they were deemed good breeders. One account states:

> One day Massa Benford takes us to town and puts us on dat auction block and a man named Bill Dunn bought me. I was 'bout seven years old. Talkin' 'bout somethin' awful, you should have been dere. De slave owners was shoutin' and sellin' chillen to one man de mama and pappy to 'nother. De slave cries and takes on somethin' awful. If a woman had lots of chillen she was sold for mo' [more], 'cause it a sign she a good breeder (Conrad 2001, 262).

Ms. Baartman, black women during the Middle Passage, and black women sold on the auction block were exploited and objectified at the hands of white men in Europe and America. The oppressive system put exploited black women shamelessly in public and private spaces. Consequently, mainstream cinema and pornographic

filmmakers have a historical context for constructing and framing film images of black women, which capitalizes on the "animal like" qualities of the black female body. White men carved out images of black women from which they have never recovered, and indeed these images get recasted and redoubled in both contemporary pornography and Hollywood cinema.

CHAPTER 4

PLANTATION LIFE AND THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

Plantation Life

In the nineteenth century, enslaved women on plantations in America, Europe, and the Caribbean experienced long-term oppression unlike anything they had ever known. Sexually speaking, they were raped and sometimes mutilated as husbands and children watched helplessly. Throughout the antebellum south, black women endured the perverse whims of their white enslavers. Conversely, contemporary and pornographic cinema recreates and profit from the aforementioned exploitative images.

To be sure, the black woman's image in America, since her enslavement, has been controlled and manipulated primarily by white men. Her image has been maliciously constructed in such a way that only a concentrated effort in remaking her image can eliminate the stereotypes which exist. Her image as sexualized chattel to be sold to the highest bidder, and her image as a sexual big mama, half naked and chained, served to make her the poster child for objectified other. Patricia Hill Collins supports this idea in *Black Feminist Thought*:

> Finally, controlling images applied to Black women hat originated during the slave era attest to the ideological dimension of U.S. black women's oppression. From jezebels, and breeder women of to the . . .ubiquitous Black prostitutes, . . .negative stereotypes applied to African-American women have been fundamental to Black women's oppression (Collins 2000, 5).

The exploitation of black women's bodies serves multiple purposes. First, it justifies the use of her body to satisfy white male lust for illicit sexual exploitation. Second, it creates an equation wherein black women's bodies were profitable for whites, in that enslaved black women bred enslaved black children, thereby allowing white male slaveholders to profit from the sale of her offspring. In William and Ellen Craft's account of slavery, William Craft writes, "My wife's first master was her father, and her mother his slave, and the latter is still the slave of his widow" (Craft 1999, 406).

The current images of black women in film are microcosms of what they endured on the plantation. The dehumanizing nature of these modern day images makes it all but impossible for black women to escape the racialized and sexualized images manufactured by American culture. The constructs created left enslaved women few options; they could either acquiesce or fight back. Reverend Ishrael Massie states in *Unchained Memories*:

> . . .Marsters an overseers use to make slaves dat wuz wid deir husbands git up, do as dey say. Send husbands out on de farm, milkin' cows or cuttin' wood. Den he gits in bed wid slave himself. Some women would fight an tussel. Others would be 'umble feared of dat beatin (*Unchained Memories* 2002, 98).

Enslaved women were publicly exploited and brutally punished for perceived infractions by their enslavers. Typically, the enslaved woman was completely naked while being beaten by her white master and overseer. In *Autobiography of a Female Slave* Mattie Griffith, a slave woman, exposes this truth when she describes her whipping at the hands of her masters:

> I knew that resistance was in vain; so I submitted to have my clothes torn from my body; for modesty, so much commended in a white woman, is in a negro pronounced affectation. . .I was loaded with contumely bound

> hand and foot in irons, with jeering faces around vulgar eyes glaring on my uncovered body, and two inhuman men about to lash me to the bone (Griffith 1998, 48).

The abuse of black women and men was sadomasochistic and in full view of everyone on the plantation. The demeaning images of black women in pornography today depict the position of domination enjoyed by white men over black women since the days of slavery. Historically, black women were gang raped on the plantation. In some contemporary pornographic movies, black women are bound and gagged, which mirrors the realities of their sexual exploitation during slavery (Hooks 1992, 74). The only difference between the images of black women in pornography and the rape and exploitation of black women on the plantation is that pornography is mass produced and distributed, allowing white men everywhere to "enjoy" the pornographic images of black women in the privacy of their homes.

Historically, images of black women display them as sexually deviant creatures, which today frees white men to exploit black women without repercussions from society at large. The psychological effects of positing black women as having an animal-like sexual appetite created an atmosphere in the nineteenth century which defined black women as pathological and white men as normal. Deborah Gray White, in *Aren't I A Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, reinforces the idea that the exploitation of black women had sexual overtones:

> Without a doubt, some whippings of female slaves were sexually suggestive. . .The whipping of a thirteen-year-old Georgia slave girl also had sexual overtones. The girl was put on all fours 'sometimes her head down and sometimes up' and beaten until froth ran from her mouth (Gray 1985, 33).

In addition, the public exploitation of black women also led to private

indignities. Enslaved women were raped on the plantation, but because black women were considered property, it was deemed a right of white men. "Rape meant, by definition, rape of white women, for no such crime as rape of a black woman existed as law" (Genovese 1976, 33). To be sure, not every enslaved woman was raped, but the enslaved woman who seemingly submitted to sexual relations with her master actually had no choice in the matter. In *Unchained Memories: Reading from the Slave Narratives*, former slave Mary Estes Peters, recounts the rape of her mother:

> Mother always worked in the house. . .while she was alone, the boys came in and threw her down on the floor and tied her down so she couldn't struggle and one after the other used her as long as they wanted for the whole afternoon. . .that's the way I came to be here (*Unchained Memories* 2002, 96).

The illicit relationships between enslaved women and their masters foreshadowed many of the relationships that audiences see in mainstream cinema and pornography today. Bondage scenes in pornography often depict black women being beaten and raped, mirroring the real life horrors of black women on the plantation. The following is an account of the rape of author Pauli Murray's grandmother, Harriet:

> Each evening, she nailed her door shut, barricading herself in her cabin. Unfortunately, these precautions failed to protect her. . .One night Sidney broke into Harriet's cabin and raped her. This practice became a nightly ritual-the smashing of the door, the sound of a woman screaming, the cries for mercy, the beating, the moans, and finally silence (qtd. in Clinton 1989, 10).

Thus, when white men raped black women, justice turned a blind eye. They were able to satisfy their lust, and if the rapes of black women resulted in pregnancy, the men reaped the rewards of the black woman and her child in terms of labor and profit. A former slave remembers:

> 'Granny,' I said, 'did your master harm you in another way?'. . .'Did

> you see dat girl in da house below here? Dat's my chile by him. I had five, but dat de only one livin' now. I didn't want him, but I couldn't do nothin' (Blassingame 1977, 540).

The unequal and complex interplay between black women and white men throughout the rural South remained stagnant as blacks exited the plantation via emancipation. However, their migration north did not emancipate black women from the abuse of white men.

Harlem Renaissance

The 1920s ushered in the Harlem Renaissance or as described by Alain Locke, "the New Negro" era. It was a period in which artistic genres and black creativity merged and catapulted blacks' from invisibility to visibility. The Harlem Renaissance writers aimed at correcting the stereotypical images which had governed their public persona for a hundred years. According to Bruce M. Tyler:

> Blacks finally launched an offensive against stereotypes by promoting the emerging Harlem Renaissance which had become evident at the turn of the century. It was a massive effort to project positive black images to break down the racial stereotypes perceived as barriers to freedom and opportunity (Tyler 1992, 3).

The Harlem Renaissance was steeped in its own sort of "double consciousness." Brilliant black artists of the period, from Zora Neale Hurston to Josephine Baker, depended on white support. White patrons financially assisted many black artists, but this too, was cloaked in racist subterfuge.

Throughout the Harlem Renaissance, pornographic images of black women emerged full scale with the advent of new technology—film. These new images were considered both artistic and erotic; however, in terms of the new visual medium-film,

they were neither artistic nor erotic. Hollywood opened its doors to black artists as never before, but blacks were relegated to "native" and "cottonfield" roles in Hollywood films. However, art and literature were quite successful for blacks during the Harlem Renaissance. Perhaps because the individual sculpted great works of art (Romare Bearden) and wrote progressive novels (Zora Neale Hurston), they did not have to depend solely on outside forces to guarantee their success or failure.

However, in Hollywood, black actresses and actors depended on the studio to cast them in movies. Movies defined them as caricatures and supported society's constructed stereotypes. Alain Locke, architect of the "New Negro," asserts that "Hollywood particularly, in spite of a new medium, is still snared in a reactionary groove and prostitutes genuine Negro talent to perpetuation among the masses of reactionary social and racial stereotypes of characters and situation" (Tyler 1992, 77).

In fact, Josephine Baker, a phenomenally talented performer, a "triple theatrical threat" because she could act, sing, and dance, was an artist who typified the contradictory aspects of the Harlem Renaissance and black women's lives in general. Josephine Baker was destined to succeed, but she was considered too dark to be successful in America. Her dark complexion limited her choice of artistic projects. For example, the infamous "brown bag" test (African American women had to be lighter than a paper bag in order to perform onstage in Harlem Renaissance nightclubs), initiated during the Harlem Renaissance allowed light complexioned women to perform in front of all white audiences. If darker-skinned women entered the artistic arena they often had to play grinning pickanninies. Black female performers grapple with similar issues today.

> . . .the stereotype of the "grinning darkey" blissfully content with his or her station in life is rooted in antebellum notions and idealized depictions of plantation life; yet it persists into the twenty-first century and renders every image of an enthusiastic black person as potentially derogatory or problematical (Willis and Williams 2002, 2).

Thus, the Harlem Renaissance was liberating in that it challenged blacks, regardless of complexion, to see their own innate beauty. African-American artists consciously created images in which African Americans would be proud of their bodies and heritage. Essentially, black artists wanted to deconstruct the public use of black nudity and present sex and sexuality in the black community with dignity and grace. They sought to reconstruct and redefine black womanhood and black manhood, as exemplified in Zora Neale Hurston's literary works and Romare Bearden's paintings. In order to gain control of African-American images, black artists during the Harlem Renaissance created works of art that portrayed African Americans as sensuous beings, devoid of the deviant sexuality promulgated by white America.

Yet, the popularity of Josephine Baker, who began her career portraying a pickaninny/buffoon and later transformed herself into a sexy siren did not help to redefine black women's images. She appeared in *La Revue Negre* and *Folies Bergere* in Paris. Baker achieved notoriety, not based solely on her amazing talents, but on the amount of "skin" she was willing to display.

Nudity as an art form loses its context in light of Josephine Baker's image. In her case, it was a sort of a reverse exploitation. Baker openly exploited the stereotypical images assigned to African-Americans. Her stage act gave white audiences the very things they wanted— an excuse to ogle black women's bodies and all they had to do was pay a few dollars to see it. Donald Bogle addresses this issue in *Brown Sugar* when he

writes, "For it has to be admitted that Baker succeeded with European audiences in part because she played on their view of a supersexy noble savage" (Bogle 1980, 951).

On the other hand, Baker's stage performances were much like the exhibition of Ms. Baartman in Paris and London. Throngs of European audiences flocked to see Ms. Baker's shows in the same way and for similar reasons that Europeans flocked to see the "freak" show featuring Ms. Baartman. In her movie and stage performances, Ms. Baker was either completely nude or wore very little clothing. She wore feathers, beads, and bananas around her waist. In Ms. Baartman's case, "Her exhibition suit is designed to meet (barely) English standards of decency while revealing as much of her figure as possible. . .Xhosa or other beadwork with fringed garters, skull cap, and bowed shoes" (Strother 1999, 27).

Ms. Baartman was exploited against her will, but one wonders if the same can be said for Ms. Baker. Was she aware that her performances were stereotypes, which reinforced negative perceptions of black women in the white imagination? According to Sharpley-Whiting:

> Baker's imported body, like the nineteenth century imagined bodies, represents the colonized black female body, that is, a body trapped in an image of itself, whose primitivity, exemplified in a childlike comedic posture, sexual deviancy degradations, and colonization, is intimately linked to racial-sexual difference (Sharpley-Whiting 1999, 9).

White men and women extolled the virtues and vice of the Harlem Renaissance. White New Yorkers traveled from downtown to uptown to revel in the cultural nuances of black culture; put simply, they went slumming. Whites, during this period, were simply reenacting the roles played for them by their ancestors. In *Harlem Renaissance*, Nathan Irving Huggins writes:

> Afro-Americans and Harlem could serve a new kind of white psychological need. . .Harlem Negroes lives appeared immediate and honest. Everything they did-their music, their art, their dance-uncoiled deep inner tensions (and dare I say fostered sterotypes). Harlem seemed a cultural enclave that had magically survived the psychic fetters of Puritanism. How convenient! (Huggins 1989, 89).

The Harlem Renaissance had, according to Huggins, "coffee, chocolate, and caramel-brown girls whose lithe long legs kicked high, bodies and hips rolling and tossing with insinuation;" (Huggins 1989, 89) however, these images are misleading. These images give the illusion that the Harlem Renaissance was unencumbered by racist ideology. To be sure, the Harlem Renaissance was a great artistic period for blacks, but one has to question the lasting effects of the period regarding black women's images.

The racialized and sexualized images of black women on screen stand in sharp contrast to the overall goals of African Americans during the Harlem Renaissance, namely to uplift the black race and dismantle racist stereotypes. Black women in film at this time were relegated to roles in which they were subservient to white men and women. Pornography similarly posits black women in sexualized roles where they are subordinate to men, white and black. The pornographic images of black women during this period are often overlooked. Images of scantily clad black women with a cornucopia of fruit on their heads are images many scholars seem not to have examined thoroughly. Most African Americans were happy just to be in the movies and most other African Americans were happy to see them on screen.

In certain genres during the Harlem Renaissance, black women achieved great success, yet their film images continued to be tainted, even as their overall visibility increased. However, at the end of the day, the images of black women as lewd, lustful, and tragic figures permeated a period noted for its artistic genius. One example was Nina

Mae McKinney's character "Chick" in the Hollywood movie *Hallelujah* (1929). The Harlem Renaissance missed an opportunity to dismantle racist and sexist stereotypes of black women and men in film. The available scholarship appears to indicate that the efforts of NAACP's Walter White, along with others, had a difficult time challenging movie moguls of the day (such as MGM's [Metro Goldwyn Mayer] Louis B. Mayer) to reconstruct the stereotypical images of African Americans in movies.

In fact, racist and sexist images of black women gained strength during the Harlem Renaissance, which in turn positions black women and their images squarely in the midst of a "double-consciousness." The question for black women centered on who defined their images—themselves or the dominant culture. For example, who defined the roles for black women like Lena Horne, Ethel Waters, and Nina Mae McKinney? Based on the defined images of black women, the women experienced a level of "double-consciousness," meaning that black women's images have often been manufactured to reflect the sensibilities of the dominant culture. Nathan Irving Huggins writes that W.E.B. DuBois' *Souls of Black Folk* supports this notion of a psychic split in African Americans consciousness:

> It is a strange, prismatic vision because that world yields him [her] no true self consciousness, but only lets him [her]see himself [herself] through the revelation of the other world. . .this double consciousness this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, measuring one's soul by the tape of the world that looks on in amused contempt and pity (Huggins 1989, 244).

Consequently, the lives of black women during their enslavement on the plantation and their evolution during the Harlem Renaissance exhibited them as the "objectified other." In each era, the images of black women have been exploited,

demonized, and dehumanized. Furthermore, the images of black women, which arose out of these historic periods, has shaped contemporary presentations of black women in both pornography and mainstream cinema.

CHAPTER 5

BLACK WOMEN AND BLAXPORNPLOITATION MOVIES

The 1960s and 1970s ushered in the era of blaxploitation movies. The movies starred black actresses and actors and were usually produced and directed by white men. The blaxploitation era movies were "born in the belly" of political movements exemplified in the activities of groups such as the Black Panther Party. To be sure, black women in the Black Panther Party were certainly assertive and intelligent, yet Hollywood co-opted such examples and, once again, black women were posited on the screen as sexually wanton beings. In this era, the pornographic presentation of black women in cinema eclipsed their previous exploitation and "nationalized" antebellum myths concerning the black woman's body and accompanying sexuality. Beretta E. Smith-Shomade in *Shaded Lives: African Americans and Television* provides a strong argument against blaxploitation movies and their bastardization of black women's images. She corroborates that black women were portrayed as "monolithic balls of anger, trapped in urban jungles, forever relegated to the margins" (Smith-Shomade 2002, 13).

Hollywood could not argue, however, that there were no new images of black women in any media sources in America. In fact, the Black Panther newspaper ran photos during the 1960s and 1970s, which depicted black women teaching school and providing medical care and meals to the black community. These were powerful new images of black women. Black women such as Black Panther Party Chairperson Elaine

Brown were strong, walked with their heads held high, multitasked, and were supportive and nurturing to black people. However, blaxploitation movies perpetuated the antebellum notion that black women were best used for a man's sexual satisfaction.

The images of black women in blaxploitation movies were not simply exploitive; they were also pornographic, which is why the term "blackpornploitation" has been coined. Blackpornploitation is the study of black women's sexual objectification and exploitation from a socio-historical, economic, and political point of view. Most scholars of this subject matter agree that Pam Grier bore the weight of blackpornploitation as she rose to fame by yielding her half-naked body to the Hollywood machine.

Pam Grier's career was solidified by her leading roles in *Coffy* (1973) and *Foxy Brown* (1974). Although credited with blazing the trail for black women in Hollywood, the roles she played undergirded racist and sexist notions of black womanhood. Grier's characters always degenerated into prostitutes who performed sexual acts with white men and black men in order to achieve their goal, thereby, reinforcing the stereotype of the lewd and lusty black woman. One scholar explains: "Hollywood was not just entertaining America. It was shaping the public mind, creating and reinforcing stereotypes, telling the stories about African Americans as a people and as individuals that we would believe for generations to come" (Hine and Thompson 1998, 254).

Certainly, the fact that Hollywood moguls, writers, and producers' conscious or subconscious desire to create sexualized and racialized images of black women was a natural outgrowth of black women's pornographic images since their enslavement. Blaxpornploitation movies offered white men the opportunity to dominate and sexually denigrate black women behind and in front of the camera.

Further, blackpornploitation movies manipulated many blacks into believing that these movies celebrated the strength and beauty of black women. African Americans were excited to see images of black women on screen who appeared to have power. These black women were able to get retribution with their own brand of justice. Additionally, black audiences were under the false illusion that images of black women and men had evolved. However, in the final analysis, blackpornploitation movies further capitalized the "video hoochie" image that viewers see today. Elizabeth Hadley Freydberg addresses this issue in her essay "Sapphires, Spitfires, Sluts, and Superbitches." She writes, "white males more often than not cast Black women primarily as concubines, prostitutes and superbitches, achieving monetary success from the films" (Freydberg 1995, 232).

Blackpornploitation stereotypes posited black women as sexually aggressive beings, such that sexualized images of black women became the norm in blackpornploitation movies. Camera angles focused on the breasts and buttocks of the female stars. Blackpornploitation movies capitalized on and exploited black women's images in ways white women rarely experienced. White female actresses had the option of complex characters, with sex as an addendum to the character and not the sum total. On the other hand, blackpornploitation movies would not be such without provocative images, ultimately, overshadowing the movie's narrative. Again, Freydberg asserts:

> The superbitches could not be powerful alone, they had to be sexually active and provocative to truly be Hollywood's version of the "black badass superbitch." Pam Grier movies exploited sex and women during the era of the contemporary women's liberation movement. The creation of machisma character provided soft pornography for men. . ." (Freydberg 1995, 235).

Ultimately, as the women's liberation movement gained momentum,

blackpornploitation images relegated black women to the back of the bus. Black women continued to be receptacles for racist and sexist propaganda, thereby, rendering black women's issues unimportant. Blackpornploitation movies allowed the dominant culture to construct and control black women's images as seen around the world and more importantly, by black women themselves. Yet, other more conscious black women were constantly struggling to create and maintain images that rise above pornography; they struggled to create images that explored their inner beings:

> But the movies themselves were travesties, removed from the world and daily problems of most black women. At the same time, this was a period when black women, openly concerned about their image, were weary of the whole sexy-vulgar slut image (Bogle 1980, 190).

Many images in blackpornploitation movies included scenes where white men dominated black women. Pam Grier's *Coffy* (1973) and *Foxy Brown* (1974) are two such movies, which feature pornographic images of black women. C*offy* was executive produced by Salvatore Billiterie and written and directed by Jack Hill. Maya Angelou's phrase "historical hallucinations" has been co-opted to describe blaxpornploitation movies. Blackpornploitation movies allowed white men the ability to "hallucinate" (fantasize) about the historical periods in which they dominated black women. Scenes from *Coffy* and *Foxy Brown*, in particular, support the notion that mainstream movies encourage racist and sexist ideas and objectify and subjugate black women.

The following scenes emphasize the pornographic nature of black women in film. *Coffy* opens with a black male drug addict enticing a black male drug dealer to "sample" Grier's goods. The dealer acquiesces and the scene shifts to Grier sitting seductively in the backseat of a car. Grier, dressed in a black and white polka dot dress, proceeds to stimulate the dealer's penis and asks him, "Do I look like the kinda girl one man would

be enough for?" So, even from the outset, viewers see that Grier and by extension black women are present as sexually promiscuous beings.

The scene shifts to a hotel room where Grier's character, Coffy, begins to undress. Her breast falls out and the camera zooms in for a close up. Coffy's other breast is about to be exposed, but Coffy catches the breast, simultaneously offering the spectator a glimpse. Intimations of sex and Grier's body parts take place before viewers understand the narrative that Coffy is avenging the drug addiction of her younger sister. This opening scene directs the viewer's attention to Grier's body, which is the focal point throughout the movie. The most important aspect of this movie, and subsequent movies of this type, was not the narrative, but Grier's sexy, alluring body.

The next scene is at a bar. Coffy enters the frame clad in a sexy black dress and showing ample cleavage. She is on her way to meet her black politician lover. A white man is in the background of the frame watching her movements, which viewers find out later is integral to the story. The subtext here is that the movie is incomplete without a looming white male presence. The bar scene shifts to the bedroom and the spectator is rewarded with Coffy having sex with her lover. She suddenly stops in the middle of the sex act, distraught over the murders she has committed. Her lover thinks something is wrong and says to her, "I thought an ol' man like me couldn't satisfy lusty young bitches." This line proves that black men, too, have historically participated in the degradation and objectification of black women. It also shows that this man is not preparing to make love to a beautiful black woman; rather he is preparing to "drill" Coffy, thereby proving his own sexual prowess.

Next, the scene shifts to a post-coital moment in front of the fireplace. Grier enters the frame nude and certain parts of her body are shadowed. Coffy and her lover engage in conversation and the scene ends with Coffy on her knees providing fellatio to her lover. The sexualized Grier has thus usurped the movie and provided particularly male viewers with a source of private lust instead of an example of a talented, hardworking black woman actress. Being on her knees positions her beneath him and reinforced the claim that the black woman is used in this movie as a sexual object, never being spoken of or about as though she walks in dignity.

In the next scene Coffy is in her friend Carter's apartment having coffee. Carter is a good cop determined to rid the city of rogue cops; but before Coffy can build up the courage to confess her crimes, two masked white bandits break in the apartment and brutally beat Carter. Coffy tries to help, but one of the white bad guys throws her to the ground, rips off her dress, her breasts fall out, and he attempts to rape her, but does not succeed. The rapist is pulled off Coffy by his partner. Viewers now must consider that Coffy will be raped by white men, that no matter how strong she is, white men ultimately control her sexually and otherwise.

Afterword, Coffy decides to avenge Carter's beating and her sister's addiction by disguising herself as a prostitute named Mystique. She joins the "house" of black pimp King George. She meets King George dressed in a red jumpsuit that emphasizes her breasts. In order to "gain" King George's trust, she has sex with him. King George strolls towards Coffy, and the camera slowly pans where viewers see the back of Coffy completely nude. She turns and viewers see her breast and the scene fades to black. It seems as though Coffy's only viable weapon in seeking justice is her sexuality.

The party scene that follows features a white drug kingpin Arturo Petroni and King George discussing "business." A fight breaks out between Coffy and the other prostitutes in King George's stable. King George wants to break it up, but Petroni, referring to Coffy, says, "She's a wild animal. I've got to have that girl tonight." The film's dialogue reinforces stereotypical images of the "animal like" nature of black women and white men's sense of entitlement regarding black women's bodies.

The scene then shifts to Petroni's hotel room where the viewer finds Coffy and Petroni on the couch. Petroni calls her a "wildcat from the tropical jungle." Coffy strokes his penis and says, "Are you sure you're not just a little black?"

Petroni says, "Get down on the floor where you belong you dirty nigger bitch."

Coffy replies, "Oh, please. I know I'm not good for you, but please let me have your precious white body just once."

Petroni spits on Coffy and says, "Let me see you crawl over here you black trash. Crawl nigger!" Coffy crawls to Petroni with her dress open, bra, and panties in full view. While Coffy has the motive of revenge as an explanation for her behavior, her character still portrays the black woman as the primitive, the exotic, the animal. Petroni and King George refer to her as a bitch—a female dog—cunning, but often described as "man's best friend."

Grier's character continues to "service" the white male characters even when she is in trouble. The next scene has her being held captive in the back of a police car. Her personhood is controlled by a white bad guy and two white rogue police officers. The bad guy says, "Personally, I think it's a damn shame to let a good piece like you go to waste." Coffy responds, "I do to. . .when I think of all the fun I could have with a good

lookin' stud like you." The white bad guy assumes she is doped up with heroin and drags her out of the car, dumps her in a pile of trash, and has sex with her. Coffy kills him. However, her escape is at the expense of the subjugation of her body for white male pleasure. The exploitive cinematic images in *Coffy* and the absence of a strong storyline created a landscape in which the black women's strong persona was ultimately overshadowed by her presumed wild, untamable sexuality.

Similarly, *Foxy Brown,* produced by Buzz Feitshans and again directed by Jack Hill, opens with a montage sequence featuring Grier dancing in a variety of outfits with her cleavage accentuated. As the movie begins, Grier's character, Foxy Brown, is asleep in bed only to be awakened by a phone call from her brother who is in need of help. She decides to help him. However, the scene provides an opportunity to view Foxy Brown's body. The camera pans as Foxy Brown undresses and as she walks out of the frame, the camera has a medium close-up on her breasts that are shadowed. She reenters the frame with her bra and panties on. Hence, these camera shots establish her sexual existence and celebrate it as the primary gift Grier has to offer.

Several scenes in the film reinforce the sexual nature of Grier's character. The hospital scene, for example, finds Grier visiting her boyfriend who is wrapped in bandages. Foxy appears to be so excited to see him that she has to have sex with him immediately, but is interrupted by the nurse. The scene implies that Grier's character Foxy is so lewd and lascivious, that her appetite is so insatiable, that she cannot wait to have sex with her man at home and that she possesses no control over her sexual desires. Of course, this reinforces white racist and sexist notions of black women as hot and horny

creatures, a reinforcement of black women as part of the jezebel syndrome (Collin 2000, 81).

Later, the modeling agency scene finds Foxy posing as a prostitute to avenge the murder of her boyfriend. In this scene, the audience is officially introduced to Miss Katherine, the white madam of a prostitution and drug ring. Foxy attends the meeting dressed in a yellow velvet jumpsuit with her breasts and stomach on display. She tells Miss Katherine, "Tell me who you want done and I'll do the hell out of him."

Eventually, Foxy is "found out." The filmmaker had to avenge white male pride since Foxy ridiculed and "pimped" a white judge in a previous scene. Foxy's rape possibly allowed white males in the audience to have a moment of victory by gazing upon her sexual exploitation. The character, Steve Elias, the boss of the white goons, enters the frame and watches as his men punch Foxy in the face and stomach. Foxy screams "Stop, please" and Elias tells the white goons to "save some for later." Miss Katherine and her boyfriend, Steve Elias, decide to send Foxy to the ranch. Miss Katherine says, "When she's got a good habit we'll send her to the islands. She'll bring a good price." Once again, in not so subtle language, *Foxy Brown* reinforces an epic memory for the white male spectator in which he historically had complete domination over black womanhood. Miss Katherine's reference to the islands has Freudian overtones. The vast majority of African women and men were sold in the Caribbean. The Caribbean represents tranquility intertwined with black women's bodies as sources of pleasure and profit during their enslavement.

At the ranch, viewers find Foxy injected with heroin, disheveled, and braless. She tries to escape, but one of the white ranchers catches her by lassoing her with a whip,

dragging her into the bedroom, slapping her, tying her to the bedposts, and calling her a "big jugged jigaboo." The other white rancher enters and Foxy lapses into expletives ". . .ugly. . .white faggot motherfucker." The rancher rubs her breasts, which are black and blue, and her skirt is partially open, suggesting that she has already been raped. The camera zooms in for a close up on the rancher as he leans in to rape Foxy once more. Eventually, she escapes the ranchers and drives to Miss Katherine's to exact her revenge, but before she enters the room Miss Katherine's white bodyguard pats down Foxy by groping her vagina and breasts. The scenes have remnants of plantation life for slave women who lived their entire lives at the whims of white men who pleasured themselves whenever and wherever they desired. The pornographic images of Grier in *Foxy Brown* serve to remind viewers of the horrors black women have always faced in relation to horny white men.

In an earlier scene, a woman in a lesbian bar scene says, "Let the bastards look without lettin' them touch" in reference to men who visit strip clubs. However, this line is an unwitting description of blackpornploitation movies' appeal to white men. In other words, while these movies were sexual outlets for white men, they also promoted historical images of the white male as master/exploiter, and posited black women as sexually deviant and deserving of white male exploitation. In fact, black women were presented as desirous of white male domination. Hence, the reaffirmation of the black woman as seducer or whore.

Although, *Coffy* and *Foxy Brown* give the African-American spectator a false sense of power, the truth is that white men constructed these movies at the expense of black women's virtue. It appears that Grier's character is victorious, but, on the road to a

pyrrhic victory, she is raped and sexually exploited by white and black men. Grier's characters always pay an extraordinary price to right wrongs and for justice to be served. The symbolic meanings in the movies create the illusion that black women are bold, overbearing, and out of control. Yet, somehow, they fall prey to white men, which ultimately suggests that black women are at the mercy of white men whether on film or in the real world.

White male filmmakers primarily had access to resources, both financially and technically, which allowed them greater control in the exploitation and objectification of black women's images. The directors chose camera angles and framed shots (aided and abetted by close-up, medium close-ups, and extreme close-ups) which focused on black women's breasts and buttocks. Storylines perhaps were not germane to the overall goals of blackpornploitation movies. Rather, the racialized and sexualized images of black women were the main focus of the movies, much like in pornographic films today.

Ultimately, blackpornploitation movies were pure fantasy. Black women continued to be exploited by white men economically, socially and politically. Black women's images in film are direct manifestations of how they are perceived by society. Kim Marie Vaz writes that "images of Black women are created to satisfy the white imagination's idea of cultural supremacy and to justify European imperialism and economic exploitation and domination of Black women" (1). Thus, the propaganda machine is at work in mainstream cinema and pornography. Many black women falsely assume that they are empowering themselves when they are sexually exploited in mainstream cinema and pornography. They believe Hollywood is somehow changing based on the success of a few black actresses. White men, who run the studios, provide

blacks with just enough access to the moviemaking process, to assure that blacks uphold the status quo.

Alessandra Lorini, in her essay, "The Spell of Africa is Upon Me" presents W. E. B. Du Bois' version of how blacks, specifically black women, can turn the tables on racist and sexist images of themselves and begin to redefine what is really "real." She excerpts W.E.B. DuBois' opinion on propaganda:

> Thus all art is propaganda and ever must be despite the wailing purists. I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy. I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda. But I do care when propaganda is confined to one side while the other is stripped and silent (D.L. Lewis 1994, 103).

Hence, the objectification of black women is dependent upon black women incorporating the racist and sexist images into their spirit. Unfortunately, mainstream cinema and pornography reinforce negative stereotypes of black women. Their image, throughout history, has been narrowly confined and defined. Moreover, blackpornploitation movies reinforced the very real limitations (racialized and sexualized images) of black women in mass media. Thomas Cripps, in his essay, "Film" writes, "suffice it to say that. . .history has left black women with a range of portrayal almost as narrow as it had been when McDaniel won her Oscar in 1940. She had grown from mammy to "my old lady" and from Carmen Jones to "black bitch" (uttered as though one word)" (Cripps 1990, 70).

Blackpornploitation movies eventually faded. Pam Grier and other black actresses were dropped from their respective studios. "Having been exploited (American International Pictures) by the prime manufactures of exploitation pictures, she [Grier] was unceremoniously dumped" (Parish and Hill 1989, 145). Grier struggled thereafter to

find work in the business. Grier has, at times, resurrected her career by appearing in the movies *Fort Apache, Bronx* and *Jackie Brown.*

Eventually, blackpornploitation movies came to an end, although in recent years they have had a resurgence in films such as *Booty Call* and rapper/writer/actor Ice Cube's *Friday* series. Blackpornploitation movies stopped making money and Hollywood became bored which meant black women and men were out of work. Yet, many white producers and directors of blackpornploitation movies continue to have successful careers, like Jonathan Demme, director of Oprah Winfrey's film version of *Beloved.* Authors James Parish and Robert Hill suggest that black actresses and actors fared badly when blackpornploitation ended. "Instead, the establishment closed up ranks in the mid 1970s and the major studios, with rare exception, stopped producing the black film featuring black talent, in front or behind the camera" (Parish and Hill 1989, xii).

Moreover, the stereotypical images of black women, which spawned from blackpornploitation movies, are manifest in cultural images we see today. The documentary *Pimps Up, Ho's Down* (1999) directed by Brent Owens and originally aired on HBO's America Undercover Series, documents the life of prostitutes and their pimps. The documentary depicted dehumanizing images of black people similar to the negative stereotypes which existed in blackpornploitation movies. Modern day images such as these reinforce black women's images as sexually deviant creatures. Author Daniel Bernardi writes that "People of color are generally represented as either deviant and threats to white rule, thereby requiring civilizing or brutal punishment, or fetishized objects of exotic beauty, icons for racist scopophilia" (Bernardi 2001, 5).

The tragedy of blackpornploitation movies is that they could have been useful weapons in debunking age-old racist and sexist stereotypes of black women. Yet, instead of creating multi-layered black female characters, blackpornploitation movies fostered pornographic images of black women that continued to exist long after the era declined.

CHAPTER 6

PORNOGRAPHY AND MAINSTREAM CINEMA

Lawrence C. Ross, Jr., author of *The Ways of Black Folks: A Year in the Life of a People,* introduces the reader to porn star Vanessa Blue and her thoughts on pornography. She states, "I don't care if you call yourself an actress or stripper. . . the reality is that we fuck for money. And that is all you do and that is all we are" (21). When black women entered the realm of pornography, the filming of pornography changed forever. Specifically, the use of cinematic tools such as camera angles, close ups, editing, and the zoom lens which seek to exploit and over dramatize every facet of the black woman's body in pornography and contemporary film.

In the previous chapter, the term blackpornploitation is presented. Images of black women in the 1990's evolve out of this term and are found in mainstream cinema and pornography. Therefore, the presence of black women in pornography is not simply about sex and sexuality. Indeed, when black women are depicted in pornography they reflect the stereotypes white men constructed for them five hundred years ago. They are depicted as lewd, lusty, and oversexed. Supporters of pornography would likely suggest that pornography is erotic and liberating, but the racialized and sexualized images of black women in the sex industry mirrors society's overall idea of black women as sex crazed. Put simply, the objectification and sexualization of black women's images in pornography reestablish them as sexually out of control and obsessively desirous of any

patriarch's penis. Tracey A. Gardner writes in "Racism in Pornography and the Women's Movement":

> . . .when a person of color is used in pornography, it's not the physical appearance of that person which makes it racist. Rather, it is how pornography capitalizes on the underlying history and myths surrounding and oppressing people of color in this country which makes it racist (Gardener 1980, 105).

Pornography, as it pertains to black women, places them in stereotypical, yet traditional roles, reaffirming the master/slave dynamic. Technically today, black women appear to have a modicum of control over their lives; however, in the realm of visual media the dominant culture reminds black women that white men are in control by placing the former in subservient, sexually deviant roles.

Specifically, in mainstream cinema and pornography, white men operate the majority of production companies and serve as the majority of directors in both genres. Christian Metz's theory on cinema suggests that "the development of cinema as an increasingly realistic appropriation of the world informs the relationship between black women and white men in film" (Rose 1996, 195). Therefore, the master/servant relationship between white men and black women, revealed in cinema, is a natural manifestation of their unequal relationships throughout history.

The images of black women in mainstream cinema mirror their images as slaves and function primarily to satisfy the carnal urges of white men. Pornography allows men to view black women as objects in public and defile them in private. Film narratives, which subjugate black women, are created to satisfy the imaginations of white and unfortunately some black men. Film narratives allow white men to envisage the world as it used to be, a world in which black women were unable to move through the world

without the consent of white men. Historically, white men dominated every aspect of black women's lives. In fact, "people of color were caught in a culturally manufactured double bind, relegated to the lowest rung of the evolutionary ladder, yet looked on as a source of visceral entertainment as well" (Krasner 2001, 195).

Just as Europeans were obsessed with Ms. Baartman, white men in general in mainstream cinema and pornography are obsessed with the genitalia and buttocks of black women's bodies in a way different from their obsession with white women's bodies. Pornography allows white men the opportunity to relive the moments when black women were subject to their every sexual whim and fantasy with complete and total impunity. Even today, white men propagate false stereotypes through film, which continue to depict black women as loud-mouthed and oversexed, ready and willing to do anything with anyone:

> Black women's portrayal in pornography as caged, chained, and naked creatures who possess "panther-like,' savage, and exotic sexual qualities (Forna 1992) reinforces this theme of Black women's "wildness" as symbolic of unbridled female sexuality (Collins 2000, 139).

Black women, during their enslavement in America, were positioned as "public consumption." The public, particularly white men, could access black women's bodies' ad nausea. Today, the public consumption of black women's images manifests itself with the popularity of contemporary national porn magazines. *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, and *Hustler* magazines continually exploit and objectify black women in the pages of their magazines. To be sure, white women are objectified in pornography, yet they still are presented as romantic objects. However, black women's images must be considered through a different lens. Black women in pornography are not simply erotic beings.

Their past and present images posit them as oversexed creatures. They are not human; they are akin to animals, existing solely for the benefit of white male pleasure. Hugh Hefner, founder of *Playboy* in 1953, did not feature his first black female centerfold Jennifer Jackson (fig. 3, p. 61) until March 1965. Ms. Jackson's presence in the publication provided white men from all walks of life the opportunity to gaze at the black female body. Hugh Hefner ignorantly boasts that "portraying women of color as sex objects to a predominantly white male readership is a radical development that shows *Playboy's* social conscience" (Mayall and Russell 1995, 291).

However, some *Playboy* readers had quite a different response to Jennifer Jackson's pictorial. In the "Dear Playboy" section in *Playboy's* June 1965 issue, for example, readers wrote "Integration has reached into schools, all forms of business and now it seem to have taken over *Playboy*" and "I do not need the foldout in the March issue and I am returning it to you. There are too many Negroes at this university now [Concord College in Athens, West Virginia]" (Playboy 1965, 13). Clearly, some readers of *Playboy* were upset with the presence of a black woman, but one can assume that the vast majority of readers were titillated by her appearance since black women, thereafter, appeared and continue to appear, in *Playboy* and other porn magazines.

In the 1980s, porn magazines increased their coverage of black women by depicted famous black women. The subtext of such photos reinforces the notion that not even celebrated black women are beyond being racialized and sexualized. However, white women, within the context of porn magazines, are depicted and displayed in romantic backdrops and are tastefully posed to the benefit of their status in society. *Penthouse* escalated the objectification and public exploitation of black women by

Fig. 3. Jennifer Jackson, Playboy, Vol.12. No. 6. June 1965.

displaying photos of the first black Miss America, Vanessa Williams. The photos depicted Ms. Williams completely nude and in explicit sexual positions with a woman. Further, in the 1990s, *Playboy* enticed black women such as LaToya Jackson and Robin Givens to pose for the magazine. In *Playboy's* March 1989 issue, photos of Ms. Jackson imitate a jungle theme. Her hair looks like a lion's mane. One photo displays her nude body and her breasts and buttocks are exposed; string (upon first glance it looks like netting) is haphazardly thrown over her body, intimating that Jackson is a wild animal who had been captured. Actress Robin Givens, in the September 1994 *Playmate* spread, was completely nude, her hair combed into the shape of a lion's mane, blowing in the wind. She is photographed walking through a field, and the only clothing she has on is hiking boots and socks. The *Playboy* photos of Ms. Jackson and Ms. Givens have a jungle motif and place them in outdoor settings, suggesting that black women are wild beasts, hungry for sex.

Many actresses assume that, by posing in these magazines, their careers will be invigorated and their bank accounts increased. And while one can certainly assume that Ms. Jackson and Ms. Givens were well compensated, their careers spiraled downward. However, white actresses who pose in porn magazines fare much better than black actresses. The pictorials boost their careers and the financial rewards are great. Take the careers of Pamela Anderson (*Baywatch*) and Sharon Stone (*Casino*), for example. Both Anderson and Sharon are rich, successful, and popular actresses. Pamela Anderson posed in *Playboy* in 1989, 1994, 1995, and 1999. Sharon Stone appeared in *Playboy* in 2002. Both Anderson and Stone were artfully posed-and exposed in their *Playboy* spreads. They were photographed with romantic backdrops, costumes, settings, and

themes. The images of Anderson and Stone suggest that they were placed on a pedestal even though they were posing nude in a porn magazine. However, for black actresses' such as Given's their appearance in these porn magazines cost them their dignity.

Later; Flynt introduced pornography that depicted rape, bondage, and bestiality photos. *Hustler* was one of the first magazines to display interracial sex. Laura Kipnis in *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America* suggests that not all of America was ready to see the crossing of racial boundaries through interracial sex. The interracial sex featured a black man and a white woman. She contends that, "Hustler. . . provoke[d] reader outrage with a 1975 interracial pictorial" (Kipnis 1999, 131). One wonders if the readers of *Hustler* would have been similarly outraged if the photos depicted a black woman and a white man. Today, in pornography, there seems to be an unwritten rule that interracial sex between black men and white women is frowned upon. Yet, sex between black women and white men is accepted:

> The adult industry has its own until recently unwritten codes. One is that a black male actor having sex with a white actress is taboo. Many of the companies feel that a black male actor having sex with a white female is degrading to the white actress. . . However, there are no rules against white male actors having sex with black females (Ross 1996, 14).

It is interesting that publishers Hugh Hefner, Bob Guccione, and Larry Flynt perceive themselves as the epitome of white liberalism and stalwarts of democracy because they feature black women in their magazines. Perhaps they feel that they are equal opportunity exploiters of women. Yet, they willfully ignore the history of black women as the "objectified other." If they were truly conscious, they would consider all aspects of a people's history instead of blatantly degrading and dehumanizing women of color.

Unfortunately, black female porn stars in the twenty-first century are reduced to their genitalia and buttocks, much like the images of black women which precede them. Pornographic movies such as *Ghetto Booty 3*, *Butt F____ Black Babes*, *Ghetto A___* and *Thick in the Black* are movies which particularly demean and exploit black women. Representative of this group, *Ghetto Booty 3* uses camera angles that focus on the buttocks of the black female porn stars having sex doggy style, longer than the camera zooms in on the genitalia of white women, hence the title, *Ghetto Booty 3*.

The black female in mainstream cinema and pornography is posited as highly sexual. In other words, she is either a passive victim who has "things" done to her or she is a hot, lewd and lusty individual waiting to siphon the very life out of her victims. White women, however, represent the quintessential essence of beauty, chastity and "womanness." Carolyn Sorisio in *Fleshing Out America: Race, Gender and the Politics of the Body in American Literature, 1833-1879* writes:

> Van Evrie writes of white women's "blush of maiden modesty" but for Black women [he asks] can anyone suppose such a thing is possible to a black face?. . . And if the latter cannot reflect these things in her face. . .if her features are utterly incapable of expressing emotions so elevated and beautiful, is it not certain that she is without them-that they have no existence in her inner being, are no portion of her moral nature (Sorisio 2002, 34).

Van Evrie's description of black women in the nineteenth century parallels the images of black women in mainstream cinema and pornography today. The prevailing theory among nineteenth century scholars was that unlike virtuous white women to whom blushing was natural and who were considered a "blush of maiden modesty," black women could not blush, which supported their theory that black women were immodest and that black women had uncontrollable and animalistic sexual appetites. The

prevailing images of black women posit that they are sex-starved savages who are lacking in beauty and depth. Although there are some movies that depict the beauty and depth of black women, far too often both white and black filmmakers make mockeries of black women by reducing their portrayal simply to sexual expressions.

Typically, in pornography, the black woman is not expected to speak unless in response to a question from the director. Black women in pornography moan, grunt, or utter phrases such as "f___ me harder." On the other hand, white women in pornography are given "scripts" with "dialogue" no matter how absurd and generic. The director dictates every aspect of the movie. Pornography assumes the position that black women can "take the pain" (the sadomasochistic nature of pornography) and that her body is built for "it." If she were to object to the brute force of a sex act, this would disrupt the viewer's gaze. In as much as she is visible on screen, ultimately, she is invisible.

The recent mainstream movie *Biker Boyz* (2003) is no different than some porn films since the majority of movies featuring black women posit them as sexual objects. In fact, actress Sally Richardson plays a lesbian character who grunts her way through the movie, wearing tight leather outfits. She ogles other scantily clad women in the movie, which creates the ultimate male fantasy, sex with two or more women. *Biker Boyz* is pornographic because black women are depicted as repositories of black male lust and rage. The men use the women's bodies upon which to vent their frustration and to celebrate their triumphs. For example, when Laurence Fishburne's character frets over his relationship with his son he goes to the house of his girlfriend played by Lisa Bonet, has sex with her and discusses his problems; all the while Bonet merely has one or two lines. *Biker Boyz* is included in this thesis because the movie's title clearly implies that it

is about *Biker "Boyz*," but the presence of black women in this movie demands an examination. Comparing and contrasting the images of black women in film allows scholars the opportunity to challenge and reshape black women's images in mainstream cinema, pornography, and the larger society.

Pornographic images of black women strip them of all humanity, similar to Ms. Baartman. Of course, the perception of Ms. Baartman as having animalistic features was part of the pathology of white men's goal to control, exploit, and subjugate black women. In pornographic movies camera angles, shot selection, and close-ups depict snarling and grunting black women hungry for the male penis. Their eyes bulge out and their mouths are agape as they eagerly prepare for the "money shot." As depicted in porn filmmaker Mark Wood's *Bangin in Da Hood*, and author Linda Williams' *Hardcore Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible*," "the money shot can be viewed as the most representative instance of phallic power and pleasure" (Williams 1989, 95).

White filmmaker Mark Wood's pornographic series, *Bangin in Da Hood*, is a low budget porn movie, which emphasizes the subjugation of black women. The film opens with Woods cruising East Los Angeles talking to the camera and saying he is looking for the "Best bodies, butts, best black p____" and "better freaks, better hotties" (Woods 2002). In this movie's series the mis-en-scene (sets, lights, costumes in a movie) tells the audience who and what are important in the film. Wood's film suggests the gratification of white male lust as the ultimate objective. Robert Kolker in the essay "The Film Text and Film Form" writes "Mis-en-scene. . .was also a way to connect personality, style, and meaning" (Kolker 2000, 17). For example, black female porn stars are sex objects in Wood's films and are not allowed to speak and when they try Wood's shoves a penis in

their mouth and the mis-en-scene is completely absent from the movie. In the case of black female porn stars in Wood's film, they are sexual objects who were void of personality, style, and meaning.

Bangin in Da Hood's first porn scene finds Woods picking up a black woman named Cashmere. The scene opens with a shot of an apartment complete with a black pleather (fake leather) couch as the centerpiece for the sexual action. Cashmere walks into the apartment and takes off her clothes. Woods pulls down his shorts and leaves on his sneakers and socks. There is a close-up shot of her buttocks and she gives him fellatio without a condom which suggests that black women are not respected or important enough to have safe sex measures in place during intercourse. Then there is a shot of Woods holding her buttocks (his wedding ring is in the shot). The frame also features a close up of her on top of Woods with his private penetrating her. Woods does not kiss or caress any part of Cashmere's body except her buttocks. The actress is visually present, but she is ultimately a receptacle for Wood's sexual pleasure. Extreme close-ups of his white penis going in and out of her vagina center the frame. The piece de resistance is the money shot in her mouth. She continues to give him fellatio while he ejaculates, and Cashmere turns and looks at the camera, which zooms in for a close-up. She greedily licks her fingers suggesting that Cashmere is a lusty creature who has no sexual inhibitions which is the theory promulgated throughout history regarding black women. Whether consciously or unconsciously, Wood's portrayal of Cashmere reinforces the stereotypical image of the sex starved black woman wanting only to please and serve the white man.

The next scene finds Woods in Van Nuys, California. Woods drives to pick up

his white friend Petey and they "call up some ho's" and get a hotel. They drive to the hotel and await Black Pepper, who is wearing an African print dress. She walks in the room, Woods fondles her buttocks, and he quickly gives her a quick flick of tongue on tongue. Woods noisily sucks her breasts and then his friend Petey enters. Black Pepper proceeds to perform fellatio on Petey with his socks still on. Woods operates the camera and zooms in for a close-up. The emergence of the actress Black Pepper in the movie takes the viewer "back to Africa." This particular scene allows the white male spectator to envision the period when white men would capture and enslave black women and sexually abuse them. The film invokes the historical image of the native black woman whose sexual prowess allows her to have sex with not one, but two men simultaneously.

The frame shifts to a close-up of Black Pepper's buttocks. Black Pepper has her back facing Petey during intercourse, and there is an extreme close-up of her bouncing breasts. Petey makes the mistake of kissing Black Pepper and Woods shifts the camera's focus. He clearly does not want Petey to share the intimate act of kissing with Black Pepper; he simply wants him to have sex with or penetrate her. Of course, Petey, cannot engage in the romantic act of kissing Black Pepper since she is only there to have sex with-not to be made love to. Black Pepper and Petey have sex and the scene ends with Petey providing the money shot in Black Pepper's face. She smiles happily for the camera as it zooms in for a medium close-up shot. Black Pepper is posited as a subordinate being. She is devalued as a romantic subject and she presumably is not desirous of such romantic acts such as kissing and touching.

The next scene finds Woods in the same hotel utilizing a hand held camera. Black porn actress, African Sexx, enters the hotel room and Woods gives her a peck on

the cheek. There is a medium close-up of him kissing and fondling her breasts. She stares at the camera as she gives Woods fellatio and the hand held camera is held at a high angle and zooms in on the fellatio. African Sexx and Woods move to the bed and have intercourse (Woods keeps on his sneakers). Woods deliberately makes a lot of noise as he slaps her buttocks. There is a wide out of her back facing him with a slow zoom on his penis, her vagina, and her breasts. There is close-up of her sucking his fingers. They move into the doggy-style position and there is a close-up of her bouncing buttocks. At one point there is a close-up on African Sexx and she looks as one in pain, but of course, since she is a black woman and the ever present stereotype is that she is physically built to "take the pain." The camera holds the shot to capture this image. The scene ends with the money shot on her mouth and neck as she licks his penis. Wood's sex scene with African Sexx reinforces the historical perception of black women as grotesque, abnormal, and able to withstand great amounts of abuse.

We next find Woods in North Hollywood and he informs the viewer that "all freaks are out on cell phones in front of the liquor store or quick mart" (Woods 2002) and "magically" a "freak" appears talking on a payphone. He offers Brazilya (a petite black woman) a ride (no pun intended) and she invites him to her kitchenette. Brazilya wants to make the most of her camera time and engages in impromptu dialogue, but it is obvious Woods knows his viewers want action and he quickly shoves his penis in her mouth. Brazilya's desire to create impromptu dialogue in the movie clearly upsets Wood's, for example, every time she attempts to engage in dialogue Wood's shoves his penis in her mouth. Brazilya is not a white woman or white female porn star. Romance and conversation are not part of the porn dynamic for black women. Their sole purpose

is to be the receptacle of male pleasure.

There is a low angle shot of her providing fellatio to Woods while Brazilya simultaneously masturbates. Woods utters "Good girl" (Woods 2002). There is a close up of her buttocks and him slapping her butt cheeks as he strokes his private and prepares for the next position, which is Woods penetrating Brazilya doggy-style and having anal sex with her on the kitchen counter. He moves her leg so the camera can zoom in for a close-up of his movements in and out of her. Throughout Wood's sexual encounter with Brazilya he posits her as an out of control woman who can never get enough; she is someone who is willing to do any and everything to please him. On the other hand, white female porn stars typically have to be wooed and romanced in order to engage in intercourse and in Wood's depiction of Brazilya romance is noticeably absent, once again, suggesting that black women do not need to be coerced into having sex; they are always ready.

Throughout the series, Woods assures the viewer that the sexual encounters are not planned; he just happens upon these "freaks" and they are ready and waiting for some "action." Ultimately, Woods' *Bangin in Da Hood* reinforces stereotypical images of black women as sexually promiscuous. There is never a time when Woods or his camera-wielding friend Petey perform cunnilingus on the black women or show them as romantic and passionate interests. The black actresses in *Bangin in Da Hood* are posited as sexual deviants. In Woods' world, black women's personal sexual gratification is unimportant; they are there to be used, not romanced. However, in *Industrial Sex*, featuring white female adult film star Jenna Haze and a host of other white porn actors, their images stand in stark contrast to the black women featured in *Bangin in Da Hood.*

Industrial Sex is a very stylized porn movie. The mis-en-scene which was absent from *Bangin in Da Hood* is quite apparent throughout *Industrial Sex*. Unlike the aforementioned movie, this porn movie featuring white actresses has stylized sex scenes which feature simple storylines and set designs, dialogue, and romance.

The next scene in *Industrial Sex* is boy/girl and the male porn star portrays a Mr. Fix It man. *Industrial Sex* tries to create characters to stimulate fantasy and promote the narrative, all of which is absent from *Bangin in Da Hood.* Mr. Fix It performs cunnilingus on the white female porn star. There are wide out shots of her performing fellatio, and wide out shots of her vagina. Mr. Fix It wears a condom, which is noticeably absent from *Bangin in Da Hood*; and the money shot is on her breasts and stomach- not in the white female porn star's mouth. The money shot is extremely important. If the money shot hits a woman in the face it is a sign of disrespect (Williams 1989, 95), e.g., *Bangin in Da Hood*, which suggests to the spectator that black women are not to be respected.

The third scene features a boy-girl biker scene set in a garage. The porn actors descend to the garage in an elevator. They utilize props in the scene, a motorcycle. The motorcycle also serves as a phallic symbol. The porn stars engage in deep passionate kisses. It appears as if they are making love. They use a condom throughout the porn scene and the money shot is on her back. The money shot in *Industrial Sex* lands on other parts of the white actress' body, which implies respect. Therefore, in each film, the value of the woman is made clear to the spectator; white women are to be respected and black women are to be degraded.

The last scene in *Industrial Sex* is girl-boy. The scene opens with the porn

actress sitting on the roof, blonde hair blowing in the wind. The porn actor walks up to her and they kiss passionately. They mutually perform oral sex and have intercourse. The mediated message in *Bangin in Da Hood* is obvious—black women are repositories of white male lust. *Industrial Sex's* mediated message suggests that white women are fair maidens to be loved and made love to. Pornography, as well as, mainstream cinema's messages reinforce notions of black women as objectified other. Kirsten Fischer suggests in *Suspect Relations: Sex, Race, and Resistance in Colonial North Carolina* that "Whites' ability to scrutinize black bodies and imagine them engaged in sexual acts reinforced the link in their minds between blackness and baseness" (Fischer 2002, 163).

Film is a powerful medium which acts as a conduit for social and political ideas. Filmmakers, consciously or unconsciously, shape the images of black women in mainstream cinema and pornography. "The combination of politics and sex as bases for control on the screen created a template against which all black performance was tested . . .and so helped to define blacks as the absent Other on the fringe of white life" (Cripps 1990, 143).

The impact of these images can be ascertained by the reader asking her/himself what current positive cinematic images are there of black women? Certainly contemporary movies such as *Booty Call* and *Baby Boy* posit black women as a body, as objects. The continuing them of black women as sexual objects can be seen in Halle Berry's Oscar winning performance in the movie *Monster's Ball*, which serves as another example of the objectification of black women.

Her role as Leticia Musgrove reinforced age old stereotypes about black women. *Monster's Ball* is a pornographic movie, which objectifies Berry's character, although it

is categorized as a mainstream movie. The movie unfolds with Leticia's husband being executed by her soon—to-be boyfriend, who is a white racist prison guard. Berry's character has tragedy after tragedy. Billy Bob Thornton's character Hank eventually "rescues" Berry from all her issues, which the dominant culture assumes, comes with being black. He becomes at once her savior and sugar daddy. As the film progresses, Berry's character Leticia; emotionally and physically abuses her overweight son, who eventually gets hit by a car. The son's accident drives Leticia to get spread-eagled for the white racist prison guard (Thornton) as she utters, "make me feel better, feel good" (fig. 4, p. 74). Similarly, Panama Reo in white filmmaker Mark Wood's *Bangin' in Da Hood* states, "it feels good." Of course, such language reinforces to the white male spectator that the white man is indeed the savior. One imagines it is easier for white men to dehumanize black women if they believe that they are "rescuing" her from the "tragedy" of African-American life. They are free to assume that their penis and money are black women's road to freedom. The construction of her character is no different from the experiences of enslaved women during the nineteenth century. White men, during slavery, sought to control and dominate every aspect of black women's lives much like Thornton's character dominates Leticia.

Some critics would suggest that Berry's character Leticia (viewers are never told her character's last name) and Thornton's character Hank Grotowski, forms an emotional bond. Thornton's character kicks his racist father out of the house. He buys a gas station and names it "Leticia." He provides her with everything the black male characters could not. He makes her "feel good," gives her a place to stay, and money. Ultimately, *Monster's Ball* made him her owner and overseer all in one. Angela Davis in *Women,*

Fig. 4. Halle Berry, Savoy, Vol. 3. No. 9. November 2003.

Race and Class writes of scholar Eugene Genovese's assumption that relations between black women and white men were based on love and affection. She writes, "He fails to understand that there could hardly be a basis for 'delight, affection and love' as long as white men, by virtue of their economic position, had unlimited access to Black women's bodies" (Davis 1981, 25). Berry's character may not have been able to articulate that she was making a decision to give herself to Hank, a decision that reinforced the historical and unequal relationship between black women and white men. Historically, societal constructs were predicated on white men wielding all the power. Hank provided the car, the house, and the economic security for Leticia. Leticia's conscious or subconscious understanding of these social dynamics enables her, indeed insists that she become, Hank's sexual concubine.

Consequently, *Monster's Ball* reinforced the white male spectator's vision of black women and white men and their assigned roles. They either coerce black women into sexual relations or rape them. To say the least, *Monster's Ball* implies that white men are entitled to black women's bodies. Historically, black women have engaged in sexual relations with white men because they were afforded very few options to survive and prosper within the white male patriarchal domain. Critic Scott G. McNall asserts that "Black women were used as sex objects for the pleasure of white men. This objectification of African-American women parallels the portrayal of women in pornography as sex objects whose sexuality is available for men" (qtd. in Collins 2000, 135).

Of course, those who object to the sexual exploitation of black women, those who decide against participating in black women's objectification and those who dare criticize

Berry's performance are accused of being jealous. When actress Angela Bassett went on record in *Newsweek*, as stating that she turned down the role of Leticia, critics both white and black, accused her of playing the green-eyed monster. Yet, Ms. Bassett's objection to the role was refreshing. She clearly understood the historical implications of Berry playing a character such as Leticia and receiving an Oscar for the role. She stated, "I wasn't going to be a prostitute on film. I couldn't do that because it's such a stereotype about black women and sexuality" (www.eonline.com/News/Items).

Mainstream cinema and pornography are kindred spirits. Both mediums participate in the objectification and subjugation of black women (economically, socially, and politically). Ideological notions of dominant and subordinate are coded messages within many film narratives. Therefore, the spectator, black or white, can never truly view a movie without these theories influencing their perceptions of race, gender, and class. Beverly Daniels Tatum, in the essay "Defining Racism: Can We Talk?" affirms this notion when she writes, "cultural images and messages . . .affirm the assumed superiority of whites and the inferiority of people of color. . ." (Tatum 2001, 102). Ultimately, African Americans must challenge the racist and sexist images which continue to haunt them in visual mediums and in their everyday lives.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

The goal, ultimately, of "*Brown Bodies Have No Glory: An Exploration Of Black Women's Pornographic Images From Sara Baartman to the Present*" was to argue that black women's images throughout history have been and continue to be pornographic. The researcher contends that the evolution of black women's pornographic images begins with South Africa's Ms. Sara Baartman, progressively worsens during black women's enslavement in the United States, and the images become overtly sexual during the 1970s blackpornploitation era, and pornography capitalized on racist and sexist assumptions of the black woman's "natural" deviance.

The historical evolution of black women's racialized and sexualized images are answered by the research questions posed in the thesis. They are as follows: (1) How does the historical exploitation of black women connect to modern day cinematic images in mainstream cinema and pornography? Many scholars such as Dr. Beverly Guy-Sheftall and Sander L. Gilman point to the exploitation of Ms. Baartman as the origin for the objectification of black women. The ways and means used to dehumanize Ms. Baartman have been utilized throughout history. (2) Are black women's everyday lives impacted by these pornographic images? Unfortunately, the black woman layperson and the black woman in mainstream cinema and pornography are posited in the same context—sexually deviant. African- Americans find themselves in a curious conundrum-

challenging the status quo while embracing it. Thus, African Americans still do not control their images contends Karen Ross who writes in *Black and White Media: Black Images in Popular Film and Television* that "Black communities were thus given their identity by describing what they were not, that is, not *white*" (Ross 1996, 8). (3) Are black female adult film stars portrayed differently than white female adult film stars? Chapter 6, Mainstream Cinema and Pornography, seeks to establish that even in pornography black women are posited as sexually deviant beings while the white female is romanticized. (4) Are mainstream black female stars portrayed differently than white female stars in mainstream cinema? Once again, in Chapter 6, Mainstream Cinema and Pornography, black female film stars' rise to fame depends largely upon how willing they are to objectify themselves, much like Oscar winning actress Halle Berry does in *Monster's Ball*. White female actresses have unlimited options, which black actresses' are still trying to attain.(5) Do the pornographic images of black women in mainstream cinema and pornography further serve to support racist and sexist notions of black womanhood? The pornographic images of black women in mainstream cinema and pornography continually depict black women in ways which demean and dehumanize them while white women continue to be idealized and portrayed as objects of desire. The racialized and sexualized images of black women are integral to the survival of the genre's success, and unfortunately, many African Americans, both male and female, buy into the racist and sexist notions of the objectified black female.

In the final analysis, images of black women in film have the power to be positive or negative. Every person within the black community has a vested interest in dismantling the exploitive and pornographic images of black women. Black men must

take into account that the sexualized image of the black woman affects every female in his family. Black women must understand that existing racist and sexist images influence the lives of all black women. In order for black women to be liberated from the exploitive and demeaning images which have existed since Ms. Baartman in the nineteenth century and that continue to manifest in movies such as *Monster's Ball*, black women must collectively take a stand to dismantle the racialized and sexualized images of black women. They must not be afraid to critique movies that exploit black women. They must not be discouraged when some women and men, both black and white, want to maintain the status quo and let patriarchy reign free. Black women must continue to redefine who they are, who they want to be, and where they want to go in society and within the black community.

Black filmmakers, both female and male, can be instrumental in reshaping the images of African-American women. The pornographic images of black women in film must be combated with the same type of passion that black people collectively utilize in uplifting the black race. This does not mean that black women's images should be stripped of their sexuality, but that black women's images on film should become more diverse by employing an African centered aesthetic. Dr. Jeanne Noble, author of *Beautiful Also Are the Souls of My Sisters*, writes that Lenin said, "Give me your filmmakers and I will make my revolution" (Noble 1978, 200). Film, whether a documentary or feature, can be a powerful and profound weapon, which has the ability to destroy or uplift the African-American community.

The *Booty Call* movies of the world should not be produced. Yet, these stereotypical and exploitive movies are not going away; therefore, they must be

counterbalanced with filmmaking which explores the complexities, drama, and humor which exists in African-American life. Kasi Lemmon's *Eve's Bayou*, Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust*, and Oprah Winfrey's *Beloved* represent black life in black art at its very best.

A contemporary model exists which will allow black filmmakers to produce movies that elevate the black race, as well as, challenge racist and sexist stereotypes of African-American women and African Americans in general. Kariamu Welsh-Assante created the Nzuri Aesthetic Model, which encompasses method, form, repetition, meaning, ethos, function, mode, and motif. At the center of the model are spirit, rhythm, and creativity. The Nzuri Aesthetic Model is an important model for black artists who consciously want to create an African aesthetic in their films and it is a useful tool for scholars who critique African-American images in film from an African centered perspective.

Legendary actress Ellen Holly in *Beautiful, Also Are the Souls of My Sisters*, states, "we [black women] seldom appear in media as who we say we are, but as whites say we are" (Noble 1978, 199). Of course, this is the central issue—who are black women? Black filmmakers and black actresses have a decision to make. Will they continue to create roles and participate in roles which degrade and demean black women, both in mainstream cinema and pornography? The repercussions for participating in films that subjugate and denigrate black women reverberate through the entire black community. Mayall and Russell, in "Racism in Pornography," explore the harmful effects of pornography on black women. The writers contend that:

> The content analysis of seven pornography books about African Americans shows that they were depicted in a variety of derogatory and stereotypic ways-as animalistic, incapable of self-control, sexually depraved, impulsive unclean, and so forth. This kind of pornography is likely to foster racist-sexist stereotypes as well as racist-sexist behavior, including sexual abuse and sexual violence against African American women (Mayall and Russell 1995, 296).

There are many obstacles that black artists encounter when creating and performing in movies that dare to challenge racist and sexist notions of black womanhood. In order to reconstruct and reconceptualize black women's images, black artists must join forces. The motion picture company United Artists, founded by white actors Douglas Fairbanks, Charlie Chaplin, and Mary Pickford decided to pool their resources to create and control their own movies. To be sure, there are black production companies owned by individuals such as Daphne and Tim Reid. Yet, at the core of filmmaking is distribution, and the best way to shape and control the images of African Americans is to control the distribution. It would certainly be effective if African Americans with financial resources joined forces with black artists to create and distribute movies by, for, and about African Americans.

There are numerous factors that can facilitate the reshaping of black women's images. Film quality is certainly important, but the black community-and America in general-needs film narratives that are more complex and less male centered than, for example, rapper Ice Cube's *Friday* series. Film narratives that depict black women as subordinate to men and that portray African Americans as always in "Stepin Fetchit" mode undermine the evolution of African Americans in society. In addition, tools such as audience development and innovative marketing strategies can facilitate change. Audience development requires that black artists find new and interesting ways of

exposing black audiences to a wide variety of theater and film that is progressive and entertaining. It means challenging African-American audiences to explore topics with which they are not familiar or comfortable. In essence, the cry is for cinema that celebrates and critiques the African American community, but not at the expense of black women's dignity.

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